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MY INDIAN SUMMER

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A SECOND BOOK OF MEMORIES

BY

MAUDE VALÉRIE WHITE

“Ici bas tous les lilas meurent,
Tous les chants des oiseaux sont courts,
Je rêve aux étés qui demeurent
Toujours.”

—SULLY PRUDHOMME

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TO
MY DEAR FRIEND
ROBERT HICHENS

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PREFACE

WHEN it was suggested to me some years ago that I should write a second volume to my book of reminiscences, *Friends and Memories*, I felt quite incapable of entertaining the idea of such a thing.

From the 4th of August, 1914, to the 11th of November, 1918, the thoughts of the whole world—mine included—had been concentrated on one subject alone: the final issue of the Great War, and when those dreadful years had come to an end, when the War was at last a thing of the past, the sad condition of its many victims, alas, was a thing of the present, and again one's thoughts were necessarily switched off from matters of purely personal interest, in the endeavour to be of some little use to those with whom one was brought into immediate contact.

But the other day the question was again brought up, and this time the idea of a second volume appealed to me. I began making notes, and gradually the past, with all its treasured memories, rose so vividly before me that I realized it would be a joy, not a task, to set them down in writing. This, I suppose, argues that a certain amount of vitality is still my portion, and that the years that roll over our heads are a quantity somewhat negligible after all!

My own optimistic outlook is confirmed by the following instance of comically triumphant vitality. The heroine of my story is an old Irish gentlewoman, a cousin of one of my greatest friends. During a severe illness at the age of a hundred and four, when she was supposed to be *in extremis*, she intimated—by

PREFACE

signs—that she was anxious to say a few words to the relatives gathered round her bedside. They very naturally concluded that she wished to bid them a last farewell. She wished to do nothing of the sort. The words she pronounced with what they imagined to be her dying breath testified quite unmistakably to her inextinguishable interest in the things of this world, for what she said was: “Where’s my dinner?” And that dinner evidently agreed with her, for she is still alive.

And now I will start this second volume of memories where the first one left off: with my arrival in Sicily after my long and painful illness in Paris twenty-eight years ago.

MY INDIAN SUMMER

CHAPTER ONE

It was towards midday on Christmas Eve that my cousin, Juanita Drury, and I arrived at Giardini, the little station for Taormina, where we were met by kind Robert Hichens who had engaged rooms for us at the Hôtel Timeo.

I was so exhausted with the long journey from Paris, though we had spent one day in Florence, leaving by the night train for Naples, where I had again rested for a few hours, that I had hardly strength left to raise my head from my cousin's shoulder to look at the lovely landscape that increased in beauty every moment as we drove up the winding road to Taormina, in a ramshackle little open carriage that almost shook the life out of me. When we reached our destination and were seated at luncheon in the beautifully decorated dining-room where, instead of holly and mistletoe, large branches of orange and lemon trees, loaded with fruit, hung in great festoons, I was so dead tired that all I longed for was rest.

Pancrazio Cipolla, a nice-looking youth of about twenty-four, who had served his time in the Navy and who still had something of the sailor about him, waited upon us that morning. I liked him from the first, and it wasn't long after my arrival that I had every reason to like him a great deal better.

I hardly remember anything else that happened that day.

But how well I remember the next day, my first morning in Taormina! It was Christmas Day: not the traditional Christmas Day associated in so many English minds with the blanched world of a Christmas card—snow-laden trees, and the obliging robin who,

with his unerring sense of the fitness of things, has hopped politely into the foreground of the picture—but a Christmas Day that dawned upon a world of blue mountains shimmering in a silver haze, with snow-white Etna towering above them all; where wide stretches of golden sands led down to the immemorial waters of the Ionian Sea, and almond trees, which would soon be in blossom, grew in thousands upon the distant hills—a world of glorious sunshine, overhung by a canopy of blue more glorious still, a fairy world of orange and lemon groves, of tall caruba trees and Fichi d'India, those strange fantastic cactus plants whose curiously shaped branches look as if they once upon a time had surely been alive, genii flown from out the pages of some Oriental wonder-tale to endow the lovely island with some of the glamour, some of the magic of the East.

I was hardly awake when a messenger brought me a bunch of roses, how different, oh! how different from the poor Northern roses of to-day, whose outward beauty has so often been secured by robbing them of their most precious asset, the delicious and alluring smell that is able to stir up feelings and evoke memories that have lain dormant for many a long year. I can almost smell those lovely roses now. Is it any wonder that I have never forgotten them—I who for weeks and weeks had awakened in the sad atmosphere of a hospital with nothing but bare walls to look at, with nothing to smell but medicines or disinfectants, and where it wasn't always possible to prevent cries of pain from reaching the little private room I occupied close to the big public ward, and where I hadn't been able to get twenty-four hours' sleep during all the weeks I lay there?

I was far too weak to go to church, so I stayed quietly in bed for some hours, after which I sat on the lovely terrace that looks across the sea to Syracuse. It was so warm that I discarded most of my winter clothes that day. I think it was that evening, at the

gay Christmas dinner at the Hôtel Timeo, that I renewed my acquaintance with Mr. Hood (now the Hon. Sir Alexander Hood), whom I had met once before in London at a luncheon-party at the Carlton Hotel. His father, Viscount Bridport, was still alive, and it was he who at that time was the Duca di Bronte and the owner of the Castello di Maniace. Mr. Hood was called "il Duchino" by everyone, and in the absence of his father was by far the most important person in the place. Everyone was wonderfully kind to me at that little dinner-party. A racking cough, that in the long run is enough to get on the nerves of even the most compassionate, was not allowed to make me feel what an intolerable nuisance I was.

On the contrary. I have always maintained that one of the reasons I recovered my health so rapidly was that I was literally "laughed" back to a normal condition by dear Robert Hichens, with whom my cousin and I shared a table at luncheon and dinner, till he left for North Africa some five weeks later. During the first days I coughed as much as I laughed, to the undisguised annoyance of a grim German lady, who said quite openly: "Someone ought to speak to that Englishman. He must be mad to make that unfortunate woman laugh like that . . . he won't be satisfied until he has killed her."

Poor thing! She little knew what I was learning every day: that happy laughter is a tonic to which few others can be compared. Mr. Hichens, whom she had been told was a novelist, became her *bête noire*. She said that all writers were odious and conceited, and that they were never happy unless they were talking about themselves or their books. Her experience, I suppose, was founded on German authors, but I've met a few myself, and I must say they didn't answer to that description in the very least.

Her horror and mortification may be imagined when one night she burst into Mr. Hichens' bedroom by mistake and found him comfortably installed in

what she firmly believed to be her own bed ! And in the twinkling of an eye she perceived that he had a streaming cold which she would probably catch when she had hounded him from between the sheets. The wretch was sipping, and apparently enjoying a hot zabaglione, which had been strongly recommended, and just brought in, by Pancrazio. When she had flung the door open she had stood rooted to the spot for a moment, during which he had turned round and recognized her, which was just like his English impudence ! No vestal virgin invited to play leap-frog with a base-born gladiator could have worn a more outraged expression. For an instant she glared at him like a wild cat at bay, and then, realizing the situation, she turned and fled. I only hope she heard the laughter which must have accompanied her as she rushed to the sanctuary of her own room.

What miracles the right climate can work added to a sudden removal from gloomy and depressing surroundings, a gradual cessation of physical pain, and congenial companionship ! I felt like another being before three weeks had elapsed, though as a result of my maddening and persistent cough I only narrowly escaped being evicted from the Hôtel Timeo. When I was told that the manager preferred my room to my company, I very nearly broke down. There had been several complaints from people who said that my cough had kept them awake till the small hours. During those anything but "silent watches of the night," the only wonder is that they didn't break into my room and wring my neck. I admit that the non-committal of this crime was praiseworthy in the highest degree. But their magnanimous self-control left me cold and unappreciative, for it was owing to them that I was to be turned out, neck and crop. To be asked to leave such pleasant quarters after only just unpacking and settling down would have been bad enough under perfectly normal conditions, but to be given my *congé* in the weak state of health I was in just

then really filled me with despair. I had been at death's door for so long, I had almost heard the key turn in the lock; it had only just faded out of sight. And I was asked to exchange the Timeo with its cheerful atmosphere, its sunny rooms, its beautiful terraces and superb view, for a stuffy, lonely little room in the adjoining street, where all I should be able to see out of the window was the house opposite, a prospect I really hadn't the courage to face. If it hadn't been for Pancrazio, who had been kindness and compassion personified from the very first moment of my arrival, I don't know what would have happened. It was he who had been the unwilling bearer of the bad news, and he who, on seeing my distress, made up his mind there and then to try and save the situation. He suddenly vanished from the room, and after a while reappeared accompanied by the proprietor, Signor Floresta, with whom he had been in consultation. I heard him say that there was an empty bedroom that looked on to the garden, the last in the passage on the ground floor, and that although an American signorina occupied the room next door, there was no communicating door between the two rooms, "so that Miss White can cough for as long as she please, and no one hear, and no one be disturb." (Pancrazio spoke English quite fluently, but he often didn't finish off his words, and one day asked me if I didn't think that one of the guests looked like a monk. I said he didn't strike me as very spiritual-looking. "No, no," said Pancrazio, "I didn't mean a monk of the Church, I meant a monk who sits on a barrel-organ.")

The next thing I remember was a procession down the narrow corridor on the ground floor, Signor Floresta leading the way, my cousin and Mr. Hichens (who had been roped in by Pancrazio to plead my cause) following close upon him, while my champion with me on his arm brought up the rear. The kind American girl, whom he had evidently taken into his

confidence, came out of her room and said she hadn't the slightest objection to having me as a neighbour, and turning to me, she added: "I know your songs, and I guess you may cough in peace as far as I am concerned."

The relief to my mind when my trunks were brought down and my bed was made up, and when I realized that the danger was over! I don't think I have ever felt more thankful in all my life.

A doctor who once attended me after a bad accident said to me: "You know, you've only just escaped being killed. You really are the luckiest unlucky woman in the world." And so I am. For in the long run I always fall upon my feet. And were it not that I have a sneaking regard for the conventions tucked away in some obscure corner of my "make-up," I would assuredly have fallen on dear Pancrazio's neck into the bargain, out of sheer unbounded gratitude.

One brilliantly sunny morning I clambered up the great steps that lead to the ruins of the world-famous Greek Theatre. Climbing higher and higher, and threading my way through thick masses of asphodel that carried my thoughts far away to the enchanting regions of mythology, I finally reached the highest summit of the eminence on which the splendid ruins stand facing the sea. The broken columns on either side of the wide opening, drawn up like big and little sentinels that have watched for centuries over their fallen comrades, the dream-like mountains of Calabria, the exquisite line of the coast as it sweeps down to Syracuse on the one hand, towards the Straits of Messina on the other, the tideless sea, as blue as the sky above it—all were bathed in the clear, resplendent light of the South that shone like a benediction over them. And a picture of unforgettable beauty was engraved upon my heart that morning that I shall carry with me to the grave.

In 1902 the ruthless hand of the Philistine had not been laid to any great extent upon the lovely little mountain town, though there were indications, even then, that he had cast a covetous eye upon its matchless beauty and was eager to conform it to his own perverted standard. It was still possible to lose one's heart for good and all to what was more like Paradise on earth than any other spot in Europe. And if I speak of Taormina with an enthusiasm which I sadly admit cannot be shared in anything like the same degree by those who visit it to-day, let it be remembered that in these first pages I am speaking of what it still was twenty-seven years ago.

I defy any person of average culture to wander for the first time through the gates of the Hôtel Timeo, down to the Porta Catania—that is to say, from one end of the town to the other—without being conscious of a series of impressions almost bewildering in their variety. At least I speak for myself, for it was only after I had spent some time in Taormina, only after I had been able to acquaint myself with a fraction of the amazing amount of history associated with it, that I realized that such impressions were not only perfectly natural but inevitable. To stand at one moment on the very spot where centuries ago the tragedies of Euripides and Æschylus and Sophocles had held great multitudes enthralled, and to find yourself shortly afterwards glancing into the gloomy courtyard, and up the old stairway, still rich in traceries, of the old Palazzo Corvaja, is to have spanned twenty-five centuries in as many minutes. From an atmosphere wholly Greek (for no amount of Roman restorations will ever be able to banish the Spirit of Greece that still dwells among those ruins) you have stepped into that of the Middle Ages, the dark, mysterious Middle Ages when romance and cruelty, piety and lawlessness went hand in hand. And while you are still wondering what sort of people lived and died there, while you are still weaving

fancies round them, you are attracted to some picturesque figure just outside, and have quickly turned to follow it down the short flight of steps that leads into the maze of crooked alleys inhabited by the poor, where now and again an archway, crowned by a vine-covered pergola, spans the narrow street. Leaning over balconies, blazing with the colour of many flowers, pretty dark-eyed girls stand gossiping with their neighbours; others, seated on chairs at the edge of the street, are busy sewing or embroidering. An occasional donkey, with its master mounted carelessly on its back—indeed in close proximity to its melancholy-looking tail—wanders slowly up the street, picking its way gingerly over the cobblestones. Thick clusters of geranium cling to a crumbling wall near by; a heavily laden orange tree glows between the crazy, tumbledown old houses, scenting the air with its delicious smell, and through a little gateway beyond which no trace of land is visible, you catch a glimpse of the glittering sea deep down below. I always used to think of that gateway as leading into space!

Before the advent of the electric light many a tragedy took place in those narrow alleys in which the sharp Sicilian knife so often played its dreadful part; for the Sicilian is by nature hot-blooded and reckless, though capable of real devotion to a beloved *padrone* or *padrona*. False witnesses could be secured for the trifling sum of twenty lire, and the offenders as often as not went scot free.

But to the courtesy of the poor people of Taormina in ordinary circumstances I can testify myself.

One evening I was returning from a visit to a friend whose villa was at some little distance from the Timeo. Being very tired, and dreading the long walk along the carriage road, I thought I would go home by the short cut that led through the very heart of the poor quarter. I felt rather nervous at the idea. Had I been stronger nothing would have induced me

to go through it when night was falling, for when no longer bathed in the golden sunshine that lit up every nook and cranny, it looked to me like the sort of cut-throat place where one might easily disappear and never be heard of again. But how pleasantly I was disappointed! Men and women greeted me with a kindly *Benedicite* from one end to the other, and when I reached home I felt richer by an unexpected experience which had touched me not a little, and after which I never felt that these people were quite the "unknown quantity" that they had been to me before.

You are surrounded by modern life the moment you enter the picturesque street which is the principal thoroughfare of Taormina, and which—needless to say—goes by the name of Corso Umberto. It is divided in two by the sunny piazza that looks across the sea to Etna and that is flanked on one side by an abandoned church, on the other by the old tower built in 1340 by Don Pedro of Aragon, one of the Spanish Kings of Sicily. Approached from the sloping road that leads down from the Hôtel Timeo, the first part of the Corso is gay and full of animation. Relays of visitors from every part of the world walk up and down the narrow street from morning till night; the antiquary shops with which it abounds are crowded with them. Hour after hour they sit there bargaining with the owners of the attractive wares within. These determined curio-hunters have scaled the heights of Taormina, not—like the Norman invaders of old—in coats of mail and steel helmets to protect their bodies, but in flannel suits and linen costumes, provided with a talisman to protect their pockets—a magic word that they have been assured will bring the most unscrupulous Sicilian antiquary to his iniquitous knees if pronounced at frequent intervals as, with studied indifference, they inspect his goods. That word is: "Troppo!"¹

¹ Too much.

And no matter whether the price of the article they wish to buy be quoted at 100 lire or 50 centesimi, there is the same look of indignant protest in their faces, as they cry in unison: "No, no! Nein, nein! Non, non! Troppo!" until the infuriated antiquary, who is not so easily brought to his knees as they have been led to expect, sweeps his wares from under their noses with a savage: "Basta, Signori, Basta!" that puts an end to the negotiations—till the next day, when they pay him another visit, and when he probably comes to the conclusion that "*Meglio vale poco che niente.*"

(I must say, *en passant*, that the funniest story I ever heard about a protesting tourist was not in connection with a Taorminese antiquary, but with a Roman cabman. The American lady whom he had been driving round the town was so firmly convinced that he was asking for more than double his fare, that she determined to dispute the question. She was not going to be sat upon by a Roman cabman even were he descended from Julius Cæsar, and proceeded to inform him of the fact in her own peculiar Italian, with its triumphant mutilation of French on the last word: "Se voi credete, potere, sedere sopra una *contadina*. Americana—voi trompete!")

How I enjoyed my own first visits to these antiquary shops! In 1902 it was still possible to pick up really good pieces of furniture: wardrobes made of walnut and beautifully inlaid with graceful designs in wood of a lighter shade, and, in some cases, containing a secret drawer that in years gone by was probably the hiding-place of many a treasured love-token; fascinating writing-tables, likewise inlaid; enormous chests of drawers capable of holding vast stores of household linen; inviting armchairs with curiously carved arms and legs, lovely little twisted pillars made of gilded wood, three or four feet high, that once, no doubt, were Church property but now were used as flower stands; linen altar cloths, yellow

with age and exquisitely embroidered in drawn thread, which, to Catholic eyes at any rate, looked like sad exiles from home, waiting to be sold into slavery with the wooden candlesticks, carved and gilded, that once had stood upon them, and the silver Sanctuary lamps that once had hung above them. Then there were quaint old rings and pendants, barbaric-looking earrings, finely wrought golden chains two or three yards long (a golden chain being the one present *de rigueur* presented to every Sicilian girl on her marriage), and soft bridal veils toned to a rich cream colour, which, after passing from mother to daughter, and after being stored away in the family chest for generation after generation, had now with the chest itself become the property of the antiquary whose tempting offers the last owners had been unable to resist, exchanging, as so many owners of far more valuable treasures are doing all over Europe to-day, what is infinitely precious and can never be replaced, for the money that is to provide them with the commonplace and stupid luxuries of modern life.

Modern life! How far away it seemed to me that winter! How far removed was I from the multitudinous activities represented by those two words! During my first weeks at Taormina I lost almost all sense of what was happening elsewhere, notwithstanding the many tourists whose presence was a constant reminder that other countries existed as well as the lovely spot in which it was my delectable duty to do nothing but sit in the sun on a beautiful terrace, reading or dreaming at will under the shade of the pepper trees, and at intervals enjoying a talk with some kind friend, or taking an occasional stroll on the lower of the two terraces that are the great and abiding attraction of the Hôtel Timeo.

It was hardly possible to buy a book in Taormina in those days. Those I read were all lent to me. A little orchestra of mandolines and guitars, and one or two singers of Neapolitan folk-songs provided the

only music one ever heard.¹ They played and sang on different days at the various hotels in the town. The *Pastorale*, the Christmas music, played in every church in Taormina from Christmas Eve till the Epiphany, was their *pièce de résistance*; no matter how often they played it, they were always asked to repeat it. I grew to love it. Had I been told that shepherds played it in front of the Manger at Bethlehem on that first immemorial Christmas night, I should have had no difficulty in believing it. For there is something elemental, something eternal in its beautiful simplicity and in its appeal to the heart. I remember playing it to Ethel Smyth when she came to see me one afternoon in my cottage at Taormina. She stayed for quite a long time—till it was nearly dark—but after she had wished me good-bye, she said: "Do play that *Pastorale* again, and open the window so that I may hear it as I go down the street."

One day I had spoken of the singular attraction it had for me in terms which an amateur of music who had just arrived from London obviously thought quite ridiculous. I was rather nettled. But Sir Hubert Parry happened to be in Taormina at the time, and once, when both of them were present, I mentioned it and asked him what he thought of it. Without a moment's hesitation, he said: "The *Pastorale*? I think it is perfectly delightful!"

I have no doubt that this same amateur pronounced it "perfectly delightful" the next time it was mentioned. It would be quite safe to do so, since it had been labelled as such by the Head of the Royal College of Music. When you are wearing a life-belt, how bravely you splash about in water that nothing would have induced you to enter without it!

¹ I must apologize for omitting to mention the two bands which always played on special occasions—"the two musics," as they were called, and which, as far as I could make out, were always at daggers drawn with each other.

CHAPTER TWO

I HAD heard so much about the Castello di Maniace, the old castle which had been a Benedictine monastery in the twelfth century and had been given with an enormous amount of surrounding land to Lord Nelson after the battle of the Nile, by Ferdinand, King of Naples, that when, in the beginning of February, Mr. Alex. Nelson Hood (whose father, Lord Bridport, had inherited the property) invited me to go and stay there for a few days with my cousin, I was not only delighted but very much excited, notwithstanding the fact that ever since I can remember I have dreaded—even hated—the idea of paying visits that involve sleeping away from home—and for the moment the Hôtel Timeo was home.

But there is something about a *bona-fide* historical house that so attracts and fascinates me that whenever I have been given the chance of staying in one I have never been able to resist the temptation.

What wonder then that Maniace should have cast its spell upon me before I had ever set foot within its walls? A far-away monastery castle, in legend-haunted Sicily, situated on the banks of the river Simeto (the ancient Symæthus of Theocritus), and at the foot of the most famous volcano in the world, in a lava-strewn district where brigands—even then—had sometimes to be reckoned with—where the last great battle between Saracens and Normans had been won by the Greek general, Giorgio Maniaces—whose glorious beechwoods and oak forests were as celebrated as its orange and lemon groves, and where—to crown it all—Demeter had wandered from the hills beyond in search of her daughter Persephone

who, according to a local legend, had vanished into the Underworld beneath the waters of a lake close by. . . . Wasn't that enough to set even the dullest imagination on fire?

I was present when—in London—some friends of mine were invited to stay there by Mr. Hood. How I envied them! And how little I thought that before many months were over I should receive a similar invitation myself!

My cousin and I left Taormina on a warm and beautiful morning, and arrived at Maletto—the station for Maniace—to find that it was still winter. During the journey we often had to cross immensely wide gorges, one of the chief characteristics of this part of the country. I was standing by the window, revelling in the strange wild scenery with its inaccessible-looking mountains crowned now and again by an old fortress or ruined castle, when the train began to cross one of these wide spaces, and catching sight of the bridge I said to my cousin: "I shan't be sorry when we reach the other side; this bridge looks anything but safe." But she treated my suggestion with what in our home-circle went by the name of "contemptuous despise," and alluded to my nerves in terms the reverse of complimentary.

I said no more, and nothing happened. But the next day when another visitor—Mr. David Erskine—failed to put in an appearance at the hour he was expected, and when after several hours had elapsed there was still no signs of him, a distinct feeling of anxiety sprang up. The country was in rather a disturbed condition that year, which I suppose accounted for the fact that the coachman who met us at the station was accompanied by a "campaniere" from the Castello, who had a rifle slung over his shoulder. It was dark by the time Mr. Erskine did eventually turn up, and then he told us that he had been obliged to make a long *détour* in order to reach Maniace at all that day. In fact he had been obliged

to drive for a great part of the way, the bridge having collapsed in one part only a few hours after we ourselves had crossed it!

The winding road that slopes down to the Castello is bordered by grassy slopes covered with enormous bushes, and was, on one occasion, the scene of a serious encounter with brigands. I will tell the story in the Duca di Bronte's own words. I quote from a little book he wrote in 1924—a memorandum for his family, which he also gave to me.

“The first memorable occurrence of outlawry was in 1881 when my father was present. A band of three armed men were seen close to Maniace by Campaniere Meli¹ and another employé, the former giving chase, while the other was sent to warn me. Hue and cry was raised and several other employés and I started in pursuit up the waterfall torrent valley. It was heavy going after rain, so I took to the road in order to head off the fugitives. This I succeeded in doing, and as one of the latter raised his gun to fire at our leading pursuer—Meli—who, unarmed, was the first to follow as he was the first to challenge, I fired my rifle. Apparently the bullet splintered a rock at the brigand's feet, and he thereupon surrendered with his companion; the third of the band disappeared in the bushes on the edge of the torrent, and as several hours' search for him was unavailing, it was presumed that he was carried away by the stream. The two prisoners were handed over to the police, who identified them as dangerous brigands, part of a band of which the leader had been recently shot in a conflict with the carabinieri. The elder man of the two had been ‘wanted’ for some time as being the perpetrator of several murders. He was eventually sentenced to twenty-six years' penal servitude.”

¹ Campaniere Meli was the man who accompanied the coachman who met us at the station.

And again: "The greater danger from brigands was during the time of the notorious *Banda Maurina* headed by their much feared chief *Candino*. They were mostly natives of San Mauro, a small town above the north coast, and many crimes were charged to them. This was in the late eighties. The end of the *Banda Maurina* sounds like 'a tale that is told.' A certain family was suspected of favouring the band. The former were warned that if the brigands were not surrendered they would be arrested. They chose another way. They summoned the band to a conference (it was said to arrange for my capture), choosing a valley in the woods for it. The 'family' arrived betimes, hiding in the thick bushes. The *Banda* came later, when all were shot down, except the leader, who escaped and, as is reported, has been allowed to live unmolested as long as he remains quiet."

It is so long since I was in Maniace that I have no very clear remembrance of the principal entrance, though I distinctly recollect that the living-rooms on the first floor are entered from a large courtyard, at the farther end of which stands a tall Ionic cross raised by Lord Bridport to the first Duke of Bronte—Lord Nelson—and inscribed: *Heroi immortalis Nili*. On the right is a chapel, erected in 1173 by Queen Margaret of Sicily, mother of the Norman king who built the splendid Cathedral of Monreale, near Palermo. I have myself heard Mass in this chapel which, although it is almost bare, contains one treasure of inestimable value—a portrait of the Blessed Virgin said to have been painted by St. Luke, but which in all probability is an ancient Byzantine representation of the Mother of Our Lord. It was brought to Sicily from Constantinople by Giorgio Maniaces, one of the most famous generals of the Greek Emperor, Michael the Paphlagonian, and a group of Benedictine monks were placed at Maniace

to guard the picture. There was a terrible earthquake in 1693 which greatly injured, though it did not destroy, the old monastery castle, and the celebrated picture which when I first saw it was hanging—no doubt for safety's sake—in the drawing-room, showed no signs of having sustained any injury.

On the ground floor close to the entrance there was—and still is, no doubt—a little room hung with rifles, with the name of the owner beneath each, so that no time should be lost in case of an attack; a very necessary precaution in the old days.

Behind the house there was a garden. It had a wild charm of its own. But I remember best the violets planted all along the river's edge, whose delicious smell, when the wind was in the right direction, reached you even before Maniace itself was in sight.

The contrast between the ground floor and the floors above was great indeed, for when you reached the top of the stairs you found yourself in a charming, cosy, English country house, surrounded by every comfort, including plenty of books and a very good grand piano—a Bechstein. Immense log fires were burning in all the rooms, and as we were half frozen when we arrived, it can easily be imagined how we appreciated them. There is something about unexpected comfort and a highly civilized milieu in out-of-the-way, desolate places that has always appeared to me the height of luxury. When I went to bed that night, not only did I find a splendid fire in my room but a gigantic basket of logs, enough to keep a furnace going! And how I piled them on! A blazing fire is the best of companions at any time, and a very welcome one when you are sleeping for the first time in a remote place, centuries old, and when you can't quite banish the feeling that the ghosts of Saracen warriors and Benedictine monks *might* suddenly take it into their heads to pay you a nocturnal visit, disembodied spirits, as is well known,

having a way of outraging the proprieties that is nothing short of scandalous. Their conduct, however, on this occasion left nothing to be desired, and on that memorable first night at Maniace I slept like a top.

Mr. and Mrs. William Sharp were also spending a few days with Mr. Hood. I had never met either of them before, and liked them both from the first. I saw a good deal of William Sharp later on in Taormina and will speak of him at greater length in my next chapter, for he was one of the most interesting men I ever knew.

I think it was on the morning after our arrival that Mr. Hood took us down to the vineyards to see the peasants at work. The moment they caught sight of him they all began to sing, and I was told it was a hymn invoking a benediction on the hand that gave them food.

The ground was dotted all over with little huts that looked like Indian wigwams, and the peasants reminded me strangely of the Chilean *huasos* I had seen long ago in South America. I felt thousands of miles away—even from Taormina. But it was when I went to Bronte that I really felt remote from civilization. It is a crazy-looking place, at least it was so then. The houses seemed all about to tumble over one another, and gave one the impression that only the strangest gymnastic feats would enable the inhabitants to get in and out of their own front doors, to say nothing of the top stories; in fact, members of the Russian ballet are about the only human beings I can imagine leaping comfortably in and out of places so apparently inaccessible. Black pigs were as numerous as the inhabitants themselves, till one began to wonder whether Circe had not been a recent visitor, and whether the black pigs were not unfortunate swains who had refused to succumb to the charms of a lady who by this time was no longer in the flower of her youth. The fact is, at that date

instead of the *Benedicite* to which we had grown accustomed in Taormina, it struck me that it would be interesting to write a song, using the phrase we had just heard as a sort of leitmotiv, and Mr. Hood suggested that William Sharp should write me some suitable words. He very kindly assented at once; he had enjoyed the *ceramella* playing as much as I had. "And we will call the song *Buon Riposo*," he said, "in remembrance of that charming good night."

The song was eventually published by Messrs. Chappell & Co.; we dedicated it to our host, and it was most beautifully sung by Madame Kirkby Lunn.

Inside the house the atmosphere was so essentially English that it was almost a shock to look out of the window where the gigantic volcano reminded you how far away you were. But how close you felt to England when you wandered down the long corridor containing the Nelson relics! For here you are so vividly reminded of England's great Admiral that the slight, beloved figure with the empty sleeve pinned across his uniform almost materializes before your eyes, and visions of great sea-fights rise before you: Aboukir Bay, Copenhagen, Trafalgar, and memories of those last tragic moments on board the *Victory*, which bring the tears to your eyes, and a passionate welling up of love and admiration for the splendid sailor whose great qualities we all glory in, and whose weaknesses we find it so easy to forget!

Thank God it isn't necessary to be perfect in order to be loved.

Here is his original will, his midshipman's dirk, two swords, a model of the topmast of H.M.S. *Victory*, as damaged at the battle of Trafalgar, made from a piece of the *Victory's* real mast; here are two glasses and a decanter used by him on board, and many prints of his victories, one print representing him as receiving the Spanish Admiral's sword after the battle

of St. Vincent, and another representing his death. And here is a copy of the Deed of Gift of the Duchy to him by King Ferdinand of Naples. The original is deposited in Catania.

At dinner one day a fellow-guest made the remark that great things were never accomplished by people who were carried away by emotion. He went on in this strain for some time with all the astonishing assurance of those who have not lived long enough to know how dangerous it is to lay down the law about anything.

At last I could stand it no longer, and said with some heat: "If there is one place on earth where you have no right to say such a thing it is here—in this house."

He was so astonished at my outburst that he turned to me and said: "But why shouldn't I say what I think on this subject, and why specially in just this house?"

"Because this house belonged to Lord Nelson," I said, "and you can hardly say that *he* never accomplished anything, or that *he* was never carried away by emotion."

For a moment I felt as uncomfortable as I imagine most people feel after making a remark when their blood is up that is followed by a dead silence. But when our kind host, next to whom I was sitting, said to me *sotto voce*, "I was on the point of saying what you said just now," I was very glad, very glad indeed that I had let myself go.

It was almost summer weather when, after our short absence in the wilds, we again found ourselves basking in the sun on the terrace of the Timeo (which a friend of mine to this day insists on calling the "Timmy O"), and listening to the Sicilian and Neapolitan folk-songs with which we were entertained at dinner now and again. Sometimes when the hotel was very full there was such a babel of conversation

that it was almost impossible to hear what was going on, and well do I remember the persistent efforts of one undersized and thick-set youth of about seventeen who, with the cocksure mannerisms of a tenth-rate provincial opera-singer, endeavoured to "knock us sideways" with his singing of "O sole mio." At first he tried to pierce the din with his voice, as a cook—far more successfully—pierces a fillet of veal with a skewer. But no one paid the slightest attention to him, and the expression on his face began to change. He was soon in such an agony of fear lest we should fail to appreciate the beauty of his voice (which was hideous) that he accompanied every phrase he sang with frantic gesticulations which grew more and more frequent, as he realized with despair that in spite of raising his eyes to Heaven, and pressing both his fat hands to his heart, and looking volumes, no one even glanced in his direction! That he himself was convinced that he stood on an artistic eminence—like St. Peter on Trajan's Column in Rome—was written all over his perspiring face, and suddenly he made up his mind to put an end to this insolent disregard of his performance—to bring us to our knees—to compel us to pay our tribute to his genius—if needs be, to break ten thousand blood-vessels in the attempt! And the next moment the air was rent by a succession of sounds such as I have never heard before or since, and in which the only words distinguishable were:

fff O sole miau! *fff* O sole miau!

Alas! he might as well have spared himself. His efforts were ignored by one and all. Even *his* roars, which were enough to have raised the dead, were not loud enough to triumph over the roar of conversation that went on that evening in the dining-room of the Hôtel Timeo.

I don't know whether he went home and committed

suicide, but I never saw him again. He vanished into space like a shooting star.

One day, towards the end of February, I received a letter from Robert Hichens. It was dated from Biskra, where he had been staying for some little time, and in it he suggested that I should come over and spend two or three weeks there, adding that he would come and meet me at El-Kantara if I felt up to the journey.

If I felt up to the journey!

By that time I was feeling up to anything! The famous cat whose nine lives have passed into history would certainly have died in a fit of jealousy had we ever come across each other, for being a specialist on the subject of longevity, he would have recognized at a glance that his position was no longer unique; that his phenomenal career was at an end—in a word, that he was confronted by a rival in possession of twice as many lives as himself.

I thought I might gaily risk one of them on an expedition to North Africa, and it says much for the lovely climate of Taormina and its health-restoring powers, that I should have been able to undertake so long a journey in no other company than my own, only nine weeks after arriving there in such a miserable condition. I asked my cousin, who was a good deal younger than myself, if she would not like to come with me, but she was so fascinated by Taormina, and the next few weeks held so many delightful prospects in store, that she couldn't make up her mind to tear herself away.

But the lure of the unknown was upon me. Years ago my sister Emmie had once spent a winter in Algeria; ten days had been devoted to Biskra, which was then quite primitive, and her glowing accounts of the place had awakened in me a strong desire to go there. And here was my chance! I also wished to see the rolling spaces of the Sahara and its wonderful sunsets, the famous oases and their

thousand palm trees, the hooded Arabs and veiled women, the snake-charmers and the strange dancing-girls from Touggourt. And I longed to hear the weird hypnotic music of the East, of which an echo had reached me once in far-away Russia when, for the first time, I heard Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Scheherazade* in Petersburg. At the first sounds of that extraordinarily suggestive recitative for violin and harp at the beginning of the suite, Europe seems to evaporate. It is an incantation that instantly conjures up the Arabian Nights. And the next moment you are wandering in the night through the dark streets of Baghdad with the Caliph Haroun al-Raschid and his Grand Vizier. You are in the Land of the Rising Sun.

I remember one amusing story told me by my sister about a little Arab boy who apparently lost his heart to her, for he persisted in following her about wherever she went, playing love-songs on a flute he always carried about with him. One day he took a cigarette out of his pocket and began to smoke. He looked so tiny that she couldn't help laughing, but he wasn't the least perturbed, and said quite calmly: "Tu ris parceque je fume. Je bois même de l'absinthe!"

It was also from my sister that I first heard of the wonderful garden, skirting the desert, that plays so great a rôle in Robert Hichens' famous novel. I knew that he had gone over to Biskra to take further notes for *The Garden of Allah*, and I realized that to visit the desert for the first time with one who knew it so well and had so identified himself with its spirit, was an opportunity not to be lightly thrown away.

When I told Mr. Sharp that I thought of going over to Biskra, he advised me to start as soon as possible, as otherwise the heat in Africa would be intolerable. That settled the matter, and there and then I dispatched a telegram to Robert Hichens,

mentioning the day on which I expected to arrive at El-Kantara. At that time I could hardly speak a word of Italian, but it never even occurred to me that my ignorance of the language might involve me in any difficulties on the journey across the island. And off I started—via Palermo—for Trapani. There I took the boat for Tunis, where I landed after about eight hours at sea. I wasn't able to continue my journey that morning, as we didn't arrive in time to catch the train for Constantine, so I spent an unprofitable day in Tunis which, somehow, failed to interest me. Even the great bazaar seemed insipid and colourless after those of Constantinople which, when I saw them in 1890, were really splendid.

Next day, after travelling from about six o'clock in the morning till late into the night, I reached what is, I suppose, one of the most extraordinary towns in North Africa. It was midnight when I drove up to the little hotel where I was to pass the night, but there were lights all along the road that enabled me to gain a very distinct impression of this strange, forbidding place, that imposes itself upon the imagination to a degree that is almost frightening. Anything more barbaric than the situation of Constantine it is impossible to conceive. It is like a savage threat that has suddenly taken the shape of rocks and precipices with the intent to crush, and ruthlessly destroy. I shall always regret that I didn't stay there for a couple of days at least.

When I arrived at El-Kantara towards four o'clock next day, the first person I saw was Robert Hichens. In his white flannels he was easily distinguishable from the Arabs on the platform. He was accompanied by an Arab youth, who immediately gathered all my belongings together and carried them off to the little inn where we were to spend the night before going on to Biskra. Strange to say, there was a decided chill in the air, so much so that I was shivering when we reached the inn, and was only too

MY INDIAN SUMMER

glad to follow R. H.'s advice to go to bed and stay there till dinner.

I don't know if many people's first afternoon on the edge of the Sahara has been spent in bed, with the hottest of hot-water bottles at their feet, but such was my experience, and I couldn't help laughing when I thought of the intolerable heat Mr. Sharp had prophesied, and that I had certainly expected.

That evening we dined in the small *salle à manger* of the pretty inn. As usual we laughed and talked from the moment we sat down till the meal was at an end, and were quite unable to understand why the couples seated at the four or five other tables in the room were eating their dinners in total silence and plunged in a deadly gloom that nothing—apparently—was able to dispel. At last after many conjectures R. H. said with comical conviction: "Believe me, it's because they are married. Married people never seem to have anything to say to each other." And on one occasion he asked me if I wasn't thankful that I hadn't married a brewer!

But I was never asked to do anything so sensible. Even brewers have their heads screwed on the right way!

That evening we went to a coffee-house in the tiny village close by, and for the first time I tasted Arab coffee and watched it prepared by one of the hooded Arabs I had been so anxious to see. And when we returned to the inn we found other Arabs in the moonlit courtyard who had come to dance the sword-dance for our benefit. Many years later, when I was in Florence, I wrote the music for a play by R. H., in which the principal part was taken by Mrs. Patrick Campbell. It was called *The Law of the Sands*, and the scene was laid in the Sahara. In the letter in which he asked me to write the music, he said: "Try and think yourself back in El-Kantara, in that courtyard where you saw those Arabs dance the sword-dance, and then I am sure you will be able to send

me what I want." I can't remember all he wrote, but he brought the scene, for which the music was wanted, so vividly before my mind that I composed it and sent off the manuscript long before it was required. Some weeks later I returned to London, and during one of the afternoon performances of the play I went up to the dress-circle to hear what the music sounded like at a distance. I sat behind two men who were very much interested in the play; when my music struck up, the younger of the two turned to his companion and said: "This is Eastern music." It was originally written for the flute with accompaniment of tom-toms, but it was actually played on the piccolo, an octave higher. Its shrill timbre seemed to suit the barbaric accompaniment of the tom-toms far better.

A dance was composed to this music by the celebrated Master of the Russian Ballet, Signor Cecchoni, himself an Italian. I played it for him over and over again while he composed it for Miss Evelyn Rodd, to whom he taught each figure as he thought it out. Miss Rodd was the eldest daughter of Sir Rennell Rodd, at that time British Ambassador to Italy; she was a very graceful, clever dancer. Later on, in 1920, I was asked by an English liaison officer, whose acquaintance I made in Rome, if I would let him have a copy of this dance. He took it with him to Russia, from where he wrote and told me that he had given it to the leader of the band attached to General Denikin's army, and that it had been included in their regular repertoire.

Next day we left El-Kantara and drove across the desert to Biskra. The weather had changed and the heat was very great, but I enjoyed every minute of the drive. When we drew up at the hotel, towards seven o'clock, an Arab of an inquiring turn of mind asked R. H. if I were his mother! And sadly I realized that from an Oriental point of view "my charms were ripe," like those of the immortal Lady Jane in

Sullivan's operetta. But when a few minutes later I caught sight of myself in the mirror over the fireplace in my bedroom, and saw the appalling brick colour to which the wind and the heat combined had reduced my face, I almost collapsed!

I am firmly convinced that if, instead of going down to dinner, I had sneaked off to the Casino to do a turn as "The Scarlet Woman of Babylon," not only should I have scored a brilliant success, but there would have been such a rush for seats when the next performances were announced that I should probably have been engaged for the remainder of the season at an enormous fee.

When the bell rang for dinner I could have wept, but I gathered up my courage and went down to the dining-room, where I had to walk past scores of smartly dressed people before reaching our table, which—to make matters still worse—was at the extreme end of the long room. And I hadn't been seated two minutes at that table before I was laughing, instead of weeping, over my deplorable appearance, and our first dinner in the celebrated oasis was as gay as all the succeeding ones.

I'm not going to draw a picture of Biskra. That has been done to perfection, once and for all, and whoever wants to know anything about it has only to read *The Garden of Allah*. I had the good fortune to see a great many of the scenes described there with the author of that beautiful and unforgettable book, but one scene which we saw together stands out in my memory so far above all the rest, that I should like to record it here.

I had a great desire to see the desert by moonlight; no more fitting emblem of Eternity could I imagine than the revelation of those vast, illimitable spaces by that most mystical of all lights. And one night we arranged to drive there. Saad, the young Arab who often accompanied us, took his revolver with him, for a murder had been committed quite

recently near the garden of the little Casino, and it was just as well to be on the safe side. As we drove in the dark through Old Biskra, which, if I remember rightly, is lined with thick masses of palm trees on either side of the road, Saad and the driver alternately chanted verses from the Koran. When we emerged from the oasis into the desert, we saw the moon on our left looking like a great golden disc that had been flung from the starry firmament on to the sand. The contrast between the luxuriant oasis through which we had just passed, and the austerity of the desert, gradually being illumined by the rising moon, and bathed in its golden light, was so tremendous, so impressive, that I remember the thought darting into my mind: "The desert is like a trumpet call summoning the soul to heroic action, and the palms of the oasis like sirens who would rob it of its strength."

We halted there for some time. The chanting of Saad and the driver had melted into the silence of the night. And there, in the desert, I wished my dear best friend success to the book he had just begun—to *The Garden of Allah*.

And how that wish was granted the whole world knows.

CHAPTER THREE

I ONCE knew a man whose conversation consisted almost exclusively of platitudes and threadbare quotations. During a few minutes' talk he would tell you that "Rome was not built in a day," or that "Death, my dear lady, is the common lot," till you felt inclined to warn him that if many more of these astounding revelations were sprung upon you, the "common lot" might possibly be his a great deal sooner than he expected. And all these inanities were prefaced by "What I always say," etc. One day he actually said to me—I forget apropos of what: "What I always say is, 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again.' " I've forgotten most of his other bromides, but that one has rankled in my mind for so many years that I long to revenge myself upon him, and to beat him—if possible—at his own game.

But after hours of misspent thought I have decided to abandon the attempt and to slake my thirst for revenge by remarking, with a want of originality that leaves nothing to be desired, that "Even the best of friends must part."

R. H. was obliged to return to England, and I was obliged to return to Sicily to fetch my cousin, with whom I had promised to return home via Naples, Rome, Florence and Venice.

But before going on our separate ways we decided to make one last excursion, to the country of the Troglodytes. Someone had told me they were strange people who still lived in caves. I longed to see them, so off we started on muleback, with Saad, who walked beside the pack-mule that carried our bags

and suitcases, our heavy luggage having been sent ahead to El-Kantara as we were leaving Biskra for good. After riding for miles, we at last passed at the foot of the rocks whose many caves were inhabited by the Troglodytes, and my excitement grew apace. I was—more or less—expecting to see hordes of savage people in their birthday suits, brandishing deadly weapons, and dancing wildly round huge bonfires, but the only Troglodyte I was able to catch sight of was a girl exactly like any other girl of fourteen or fifteen. I'm bound to say I only saw her from behind, when she was in the act of—what used to be called in my young days—"popping" into a cave, evidently her home, for there she remained. Whether she ever "popped" out again I am not in a position to affirm, but if she *didn't* then I am quite willing to believe that the Troglodytes are very strange people indeed, for anything less attractive as a permanent residence than that cave I can't conceive.


To say I was disappointed is to put it mildly, but my spirits rose on the way home, for the scenery was lovely. I was thoroughly enjoying myself, when suddenly we turned into a path on the rocky mountain-side, about twenty feet above the river whose course we had been following. This path was so narrow that we were obliged to ride in single file. I rode in front, R. H. behind me, and Saad, with the pack-mule, behind him. All went well at first, but it gradually became increasingly difficult to ride with any degree of comfort on account of the number of small trees that grew on the mountain-side and whose branches, spreading almost right across the path, got continually in the way. What with this very narrow track and the river immediately below, and trying to dodge the branches, which, when they hit me in the face, almost prevented me from seeing where I was going, I grew so nervous that R. H. told Saad to lead my mule while he himself led the pack-mule. This arrangement soon restored my confidence as far as my

own personal security was concerned, but how about my friend in the rear? Somehow—I didn't trust that pack-mule. I had my doubts about him. Were he to make a false step—mules don't as a rule, but this one *might*—he would certainly roll down the bank into the river, dragging the other mule and its rider with him. I began to feel certain that this would happen sooner or later—probably sooner—and every now and again I looked round to make sure that they were all still in the land of the living. But whenever I did so, and each time I said: "I say—are you all right?" this is the sort of reassuring answer I got in return: "Tell my mother that my last thoughts were of her."

When at last we were once again on level ground, it was only to find ourselves confronted with a hill that looked like the side of a New York skyscraper, and I felt like an American friend of mine who was riding with her daughter in Yellowstone Park when she saw a bear in the distance (she didn't know it was a tame one). "Daughter," she said, "here's where I turn right back."

But I wasn't allowed to do anything of the sort, and after we had all made a triumphant ascent of that horrible hill—including the innocent pack-mule that I had so unjustly suspected—I can't say that I felt sorry to hear that El-Kantara was not far off. Even my *wanderlust* was at an end (for that day), and as we drew nearer and nearer to the cosy little inn, I became more and more convinced that there are times when the sublimest scenery on earth is not to be compared to the sight of a comfortable armchair and a well-spread tea-table.

Before leaving Biskra I tried to write down some of the Arab tunes I had heard there and elsewhere. They were not only of a strangely emotional character; there was also something primitive and wild about them that refused to be captured. They were never accompanied by anything but tom-toms. And yet they

all seemed to sweep through the air on curious, exotic harmonies that were impossible to get hold of. Every attempt I made to possess myself of them resulted in failure. They evaded me persistently. I might as well have tried to grasp a shadow, or a will-of-the-wisp. At last I managed—with many inaccuracies, no doubt—to get one of these tunes on to paper, but I couldn't succeed in writing an accompaniment to it. Whatever I wrote seemed to rob it of its originality, of its fierce attraction. I couldn't make it out! Had those harmonies only existed in my imagination? Were they really incapable of taking shape? Or was some elusive combination of sounds really projected into the air by the savage and incessant beating of the tom-toms in connection with the unbridled flood of barbaric melody poured forth by the African haut-boy—an instrument whose timbre, like that of the Cor Anglais, has an almost magic power of suggestion that defies analysis? I finally decided to accompany that tune by a 5th  from beginning to end, breaking the monotony by varying the rhythm from time to time. And thus, in a way, something of the original effect was preserved.

Many people hate the music of the East. I love it. To me it seems like a savage, desperate cry for happiness and liberty.

The train that was to take R. H. to Algiers and myself to Tunis didn't start till the afternoon of the next day, and there was still one morning left. We spent it under the palm trees, on the lovely banks of the river at El-Kantara. And that was the end of one of the happiest and most unforgettable fortnights of my life, if indeed it can be said with truth that days are really at an end upon which the radiant sun of memory has never set.

During the autumn of 1900 (the year before I gave up my cottage at Broadway) I spent some weeks in

Paris, where I saw a great deal of the late Theodore Byard, who was a director of Messrs. Heinemann Ltd., the well-known publishers. But at that time he was living in Paris and studying with Jean de Reszke. Before returning to England he said to me: "If ever you go to Venice you must let me be your cicerone." He had a little apartment there on one of the side-canal, and as he knew Venice a great deal better than most people, I accepted his offer without a moment's hesitation; for he was not only a good friend, and a delightful companion, but an artist to his finger-tips. I have never come across anyone more appreciative of beauty in every shape and form: pictures, music, books, scenery, everything was grist that came to his mill; added to which he had a sense of humour that made a talk with him a thing to be looked forward to, and to be remembered with real pleasure.

Now that I was going to Venice again I wrote and told him that I expected to be there in the beginning of May, and, reminding him of his kind promise, I asked him if by any lucky chance he would be there at the same time. But unfortunately for me, and fortunately for him, he had so many professional engagements just then that it was quite impossible for him to get away. I was very disappointed, but I can't say I was surprised, for he was a singer of such real distinction that he was in constant demand. Both his voice and his method were beautiful. Never shall I forget the way he sang my own song, "Absent Yet Present," nor the passion and tenderness he threw into it that never failed to carry away his audience, as it never failed to earn him the gratitude of its composer. He was also a fine interpreter of old Italian music, and sang French songs and German *lieder* equally well. At the end of the letter in which he told me how much he regretted not being able to come to Venice, he said: "But do let me lend you my little apartment, as I can't come myself."

I was very much touched by this kind offer, and accepted it with pleasure, as it included not only the gondola but the gondolier, who was a perfect treasure and looked after us so satisfactorily that there wasn't a day I didn't bless him and his *padrone*. But how I regretted that kind *padrone's* absence. I knew only too well how immensely it would have increased my enjoyment to have seen all the treasures of Venice with a friend who loved and appreciated them as he did, and who knew so much more about pictures than I did.

I had several friends in Venice, but among those I made during my stay there I must mention the gondolier's dog, who sometimes accompanied us on our expeditions. Neither my cousin nor I could cope with his unpronounceable Venetian name, and she announced from the outset that she would call him Reginald! It was an odd name for a dog, but not so odd as the name given to a Sicilian dog of my acquaintance who was introduced to me on a mountain-side near Taormina as "Smith."

I've always loved Venice, and when we arrived there early in May she was looking her best; the voice of the mosquito was not yet heard in the land, nor the lamentations of his victims. That strange sensation of being surrounded by a blaze of colour, of being in the centre of a rainbow, was once more upon me, though it certainly was not conveyed by the ethereal blues and delicate greens and amethyst and rose that float upon the breast of the Venetian sky at sunset. Perhaps I was subtly affected by memories of the glorious colouring seen years ago, inside St. Mark's, inside the Palace of the Doges and on the walls of the Accademia, in pictures like Tintoretto's "Bacchus and Ariadne," Titian's "Assumption," Carpaccio's "Dream of St. Ursula," or any of the innumerable and sumptuous paintings of Veronese.

Colour can make a tremendous appeal; not only the colour that is actually visible to the eye, but the

magical colour suggested by certain sounds in music, by the sound of certain beautiful words, or combinations of words. Only to stand on the threshold of the door that leads into a gallery whose walls are lined with masterpieces is a sheer delight. The glow they shed can stimulate and excite even before a full view of the pictures themselves is obtained, just as every nerve can thrill in response to the first notes of the splendid *Meistersinger* Overture, or the first lines of Shelley's "My soul is an enchanted boat."

What a joy it was to be gliding once more in and out of the mysterious *canale* and *rii*, where you can still lose yourself in dreams, and where on the Grand Canal the splendid old palaces lift you so completely into their own atmosphere of indestructible romance that you almost cease to be disturbed by the horrible little steamers that have invaded the waterways of the lovely city, as a crowd of vulgar upstarts invades on a show-day the beautiful grounds and home of some old aristocrat. But even as he can take shelter in his own sanctum, so can the lover of beauty seek a refuge in that most wonderful of all sanctums, built, not of brick or stone, but of glorious and imperishable memories. Places can be robbed of their beauty, and often are; but thanks be to God it isn't in the power of any human being to rob them of their associations. I enjoyed every moment of that visit. The wonderful past seemed to me far more present than the year 1902 in which we were living. I knew a good deal about Venice, but I realized that there was ten thousand times more that I didn't know and never could know. And when my own store of knowledge ran short, I'm afraid my imagination ran riot. Perhaps it is only those whose imaginations have conducted themselves on similar lines who can testify to the amount of enjoyment that can be found in "going on the spree" with that most exhilarating of companions. Yet now and again it must be admitted that the wretch behaves in a way that it is quite

impossible to appreciate. I have just remembered a certain German masseuse who attended me about three years ago, and whose ministrations were of so painful a nature that ten minutes after she had started on them, my bedroom turned into a jungle, she herself into a Bengal tiger, having the time of his life, tearing at my vitals, and I into the much too much reduced lady who returned to the bosom of her family inside the smiling monster of limerick fame.

The Duke of Sutherland, father to the present Duke, was in Venice with his yacht when we were there, and one day I met him at lunch at Lady Radnor's lovely apartment in the Palazzo da Mula on the Grand Canal, but I didn't recognize him even when he reminded me that we had met before in London, nor did I remember his nice, kind, almost boyish face until he said: "It was at Lady Sandhurst's house. She had asked me to luncheon and you were still giving her a music-lesson when I was shown in." After that we had a long talk which wound up by his asking my cousin and myself to lunch on his yacht. He said: "If you will come, I'll send for a piano and we'll have some music."

It was on board that yacht that I met his niece, Miss Florence Chaplin, for the first time. I haven't seen her for years, and never since her marriage, but she remains in my memory as one of the most sympathetic young girls I ever knew. I saw her in Taormina the following winter when she was on a visit to her aunt at Sta Caterina. The Duchess of Sutherland was spending some of the winter months there with her children, and I wasn't in the least surprised to hear that she was the favourite cousin of the whole family. The following little story will, I think, give an idea of her lovable personality. One day the Duchess gave a garden party; on the morning of the party she asked the lady who gave daily lessons to her little girl if she would care to come. But she begged to be excused; she told Miss Chaplin privately that

though she would have loved to accept the invitation, she really couldn't as she had no suitable gown for such an occasion. I remember her telling me how Miss Chaplin had said to her: "Don't let that stand in your way. Come just as you are, and I won't change either." And then she added: "So of course I went, though I never thought she would stick so absolutely to what she had said; but there she was in exactly the same hat and plain shirt and tweed skirt that she had been wearing in the morning, which naturally made me feel far more at my ease among all the smartly dressed people than if I had been the only woman in morning dress." It is only a girl with a heart of gold who realizes what that sort of thing can mean to a woman in less fortunate circumstances than herself. And I thought of a little verse in the *Imitation of Christ*, where Thomas à Kempis says that though a leaf is but a little thing, it can nevertheless show which way the wind is blowing.

The yacht was called, I think, the *Catania*. While we were waiting for luncheon to be served, Miss Chaplin showed us over it. The cabins were perfectly charming, with such cosy-looking beds, such dainty dressing-tables and every other comfort imaginable, that I would willingly have gone round the world on the *Catania*, and risked even the horrors of sea-sickness with equanimity in such attractive surroundings. After luncheon I played, and later on in the afternoon, if I remember rightly, the Duchess took us home in her own gondola. She was spending some time in Venice. The others, I believe, were going down the Adriatic coast to visit Zara and Ragusa. I can't say, like Marie Bashkirtseff, that I have ever desired to be either a king, or a pope, or the devil, but I would have given a good deal to have been one of the lucky people who were going to Dalmatia on that yacht. But it evidently isn't my fate to travel in a yacht, for the one really interesting

and delightful invitation I had many years ago, which was to join Lord Pembroke's yacht, on my way home from Chile, and go down the Amazon river, was frustrated by his terrible illness, which made any idea of such a journey quite impossible. He died only a short time after writing the kind and charming letter in which he asked me to join his party.

When Lady Radnor heard that my cousin was obliged to return to England, she very kindly asked me to come and spend my last few days in Venice with her at the Palazzo da Mula, which her son (known to everyone as Tobye) used most irreverently to call "Mother's donkey house." Her apartment was, I think, on the first floor, and she installed me in a bedroom that was more like a ballroom than anything else. The rooms of some of these old Venetian palaces are very spacious, and Lady Radnor had divided the immense *salone* into three parts. The far end had been converted into a cosy boudoir; the central part had been retained as a reception-room, while the rest of the *salone*, which was approached by two or three wide but rather shallow steps to enable anyone sitting there to look out of the lovely old Gothic windows on to the Grand Canal, was something in the nature of an indoor terrace. She was a beautiful needlewoman; here she kept her work-table, and from here, without putting her foot out of the house, she was able to take part in all the gay life that went on beneath her windows.

One night she had some friends to dinner. Among her guests was Mr. Horatio Brown, the well-known writer on Venice. There was some talk about Sicily, and I said that I had been spending the winter in Taormina. He also knew Taormina, but spoke in rather a superior way of the "theatrical" quality of its beauty. Of course I knew what he wished to make me understand; *on s'est donné le mot*, to use that word in connection with it. But I resented it, I resented that "damning with faint praise" of a region that is

not only a miracle of beauty by day, but whose ethereal loveliness beneath the stars no words can describe, although there has been no difficulty in finding one with which to deprecate it.

After dinner I was asked if I would give them some music, and instead of playing what I am sure they all expected—Schumann or Chopin or Brahms, or perhaps something of my own—I played some of the songs I had heard in the South. That evening I played with a lump in my throat. I owed the very fact that I was alive to Taormina, and to all it had meant to me. Some places and some people can never be remembered without a quiver of love and undying gratitude; you cannot bear to hear them belittled without rising up to defend them, and I longed to make that clever man see the place I loved so much as I myself had seen it from the summit of the Greek Theatre on that never-to-be-forgotten morning only a few weeks ago. I don't suppose for a moment that I succeeded in doing that. People don't alter their opinions quite so easily. But as I finished playing, he came across the room and said to me: "Well, if *that* is how you feel about Taormina, I am not surprised you love her!"

I often passed the Casa Wolkoff while on my visit to Lady Radnor, but at that time I did not know the owner of the little palazzo on the Grand Canal where I had spent such a happy week some years ago as the guest of Mr. Frank Schuster, who had been a good, kind friend to me from the time I was a young girl to the day of his death, only last year.

About eighteen months ago I met Monsieur Wolkoff and his daughter at the house of friends in Montreux. He was a wonderful specimen of the very best type of Russian aristocrat, very good-looking and very tall, and though he was over eighty he was still slim and held himself as erect as any young man; in fact he gave the impression of being about twenty years younger than he actually was. This,

no doubt, was due to his extraordinary vitality and to the intense interest he still took in everything. We talked together for over an hour, and our conversation ranged over many topics. He was a clever painter, and was well known under the pseudonym of Roussoff. I saw some really beautiful landscapes of his at the Russian Exhibition held in the Grafton Galleries during the war. Someone, seeing how well we were getting on together, said: "Do tell Miss White about your four-hours waltz." I began to laugh at the idea of such a prolonged bacchanal, but after he told me the following story, which happened in Venice many years ago, I realized that it had been anything but a laughing matter.

One morning, at a very early hour, he received a note from a Russian friend, telling him that she had arrived in Venice the night before, and entreating him to come round to her hotel without a moment's delay. Realizing from the tone of her letter that something very serious must have occurred, he started at once. On arriving he found to his horror that her sister had endeavoured to commit suicide by taking a dose of laudanum, and was lying in the next room more dead than alive. Anxious to keep the hotel people in ignorance of this disaster, the poor lady had sent for her old friend, and now begged him to go for a doctor. After two hours of fruitless search, he at last managed to get hold of a surgeon, who said that the only thing to be done was to give her repeated doses of strong coffee and, at all costs, to prevent her from being totally overcome by sleep. Monsieur Wolkoff remained with his friend, doing his best to carry out the surgeon's instructions with regard to her sister, shaking her incessantly, applying smelling salts to her nostrils and trying, although in vain, to make her swallow the coffee. Now and again she would open her eyes for a few seconds, and implore him to leave her alone, but that was all. After three or four hours of horrible anxiety

he suddenly determined to change his tactics. Lifting her up, and seizing her round the waist he began to dance with her, dragging her round the room with him for four mortal hours. And this time his efforts were rewarded, for at last he succeeded in waking her up completely, and all danger being at an end he was able to return to his own house, in a state of absolute exhaustion.

When he had finished telling me this extraordinary and true story, he said: "Next time I saw her I begged her, should she ever feel tempted to commit suicide again, to do it at night, when there would be no one to prevent her from carrying out her intentions."

He was a wonderfully attractive old man, and as clever as he was attractive. I quite lost my heart to him, especially when I heard that several rooms in his little palazzo had been reserved for the use of those unhappy compatriots of his who, less fortunate than himself, had lost everything they possessed in the Revolution, and were working in Paris to earn a living for themselves and their children. Here they came in sad relays to rest from their labours, and for a brief spell to lead the life to which they had been accustomed before they had been so cruelly robbed, not only of their own beautiful homes and vast estates, but of their very country itself. It is impossible to speak with too much admiration of some of these Russian women, many of them on the verge of old age and in delicate health, who, brought up in the greatest luxury, have nevertheless adapted themselves to their present circumstances with a cheerful courage that is not only superb, but that touches you to the heart whenever you come in contact with it, as I have again and again. They are a splendid, shining example of womanhood in the grip of poverty and distress, and I shall always thank God for having granted me the privilege of witnessing such gallant, such splendid and uncomplaining endurance, and of

having been the recipient—in some cases—of their affection.

My time in Venice was at an end. So was my money. It was time to go back to England. A financial earthquake (on a homœopathic scale) was imminent. I had a manuscript that would, I hoped, delay the catastrophe, and tide me over till the date of my next allowance, and on my return to London I disposed quite successfully of the one and only song I had composed during my five months absence. After all, in spite of Lord Byron's appalling suggestion that Barabbas was a publisher, I should indeed be an ungrateful wretch if I didn't admit that during the course of a good many years I, personally, have had every reason to be thankful for their existence, although there *have* been times when . . . !

CHAPTER FOUR

MOST of my time in England was spent between London and Broadway. In London Lady Mary von Hügel was my kind hostess. She always called me "Mordecai!" though I have never really suspected her of thinking that at some stage of my career I also narrowly escaped the gallows. . . . Her husband, Baron Friederich von Hügel, who died a few years ago, was the celebrated scholar and theologian. His father was at one time Austrian minister to Tuscany before the unification of Italy, his mother was Scotch, and he himself was born in Italy. Lady Mary is the daughter of Sydney Herbert, whose statue stands outside the War Office, and whose eldest son, George, became Earl of Pembroke. A great many people who acknowledged Baron von Hügel as a great theologian, were nevertheless inclined to think that he was not what is generally understood by "a true member of the Catholic Church." But in the touchingly beautiful *Introduction to Baron von Hügel's Letters Written to a Niece*, and written by that niece herself, here is what he says of himself: "I am a Child of the Confessional. I am a son of the great Roman Church." And if any further evidence were needed he says on another occasion: "How I love the Sacraments! I am as certain of the Real Presence in Christ in the Eucharist as of anything there is." There is nothing ambiguous in such words as these.

He was sincerity personified. He was the most wide-minded man it has ever been my good fortune to know. Mr. Claude Montefiore writes of him that he was "a man intellectually the peer of the very

ablest in the land . . . and withal so humble, so alive to goodness in lowly places." He was offered the Gifford lectureship in 1922, but owing to his precarious state of health he was unable to accept it. This was a great disappointment to him. The lectures were, I believe, to have been delivered in Edinburgh during 1924-6.

Bigotry he abhorred; the narrow mind capable of seeing only one side of a question and the slightest deviation from sincerity were about the only things he couldn't stand, as far as I am able to judge. Many of his friends were distinguished men of all nations and all creeds, and naturally he had many close friends belonging to his own faith.

It was at his house I once met that tragic figure, Father Tyrrell—his tormented face haunts me still. And Father Maturin was also a friend of his, dear Father Maturin, who was on board the *Lusitania* when it was sunk by the Germans and who, just before he was drowned himself, was seen with a little child in his arms, lowering it into a boat. He was, in my eyes, the ideal Priest, strong, tender, wise, broad-minded and splendidly sincere, splendidly human. I loved him. The first time I saw him he was standing in the doorway of one of the big wards of St. George's Hospital at Hyde Park Corner, with a bunch of violets in his hand. He attracted me from the first moment I caught sight of him. I was sitting beside the bed of one of my servants, a Catholic girl from Broadway; it was, I think, my first visit to her, and it was she who told me who he was. After looking round the room for a few seconds he made straight for her corner, gave her the violets and had a little talk with her. I always think of him as I saw him that morning—in the act of giving. It was only necessary to be sad oneself or anxious about a dear one to rouse the splendid generosity that dwelt in his heart. I can speak from experience, for I once appealed to it and received an answer that has comforted me through

many and many a long year. And how he understood both men and women! I know of one case in which his interest and sympathy were so stirred, only by what he had heard of a man who was a friend of mine, that one day when I said to him: "Would you like to see a photograph of him? I happen to have one here"—and handed it to him—he sat looking at it for a long, long time, without saying a word, as if he were searching for something he hoped to find. And he must have found what he was looking for, for at last he put it down and said gently: "Dear fellow!" Afterwards they met and made friends. Both men believed in each other absolutely. And with every reason. I don't know how people who disbelieve in the immortality of the soul can find the courage to go on living after they have lost their nearest and dearest. To me Father Maturin is as alive as he was when he was here on earth. I can't even imagine that now he does not care as much, and even more, for the welfare of the friends who loved him, and to whom he meant—and still means—so much.

It was also at Baron von Hügel's house that I met Monsignor Hugh Benson for the first and only time. Lady Mary and I had been to hear him preach at the Carmelite Church, which was only a stone's-throw from their own house. The heat that morning was overwhelming. I thought he gave us a very good sermon, though my attention was continually distracted by the way he bobbed up and down in the pulpit; at one time he would be scarcely visible, at another he would lean so far over the edge that he looked as if he might easily fall out of it. He appeared so exhausted at the end of his sermon that Lady Mary, who is nothing if not original, said to me: "That poor man must be longing for a bath. I'm going round to ask him to come and have one at our house and to stay on to luncheon." He sent round word to say he would be delighted to accept

both invitations, and it was a very refreshed and different-looking person to whom I was introduced and next whom I sat at luncheon about an hour later. His conversation interested me a good deal; so much so, that in order to continue it, when it was time for him to leave I drove with him to Liverpool Street, where we had to catch a train. I remember we talked a great deal about Father Tyrrell, and I also remember disagreeing with him about a good many things, though I appreciated his arguments, which in many cases were quite unanswerable. But rightly or wrongly, there are times when the heart refuses to endorse the conclusions arrived at by the brain, and when it is so full of compassion that there is no room in it for anything else.

For a long time I never realized the profound and brilliant intellect of the man beneath whose hospitable roof I spent so many weeks at a time, for he was stricken with that most terrible affliction—almost total deafness. Baron von Hügel was so unselfish and considerate that sooner than put people to inconvenience he would abstain from any real conversation unless, of course, they had come to see him for any special reason. Most of his time was spent in his study downstairs, a room whose walls were lined with books from floor to ceiling, to say nothing of those heaped up on chairs and tables; but he nearly always spent an hour or so in the drawing-room after dinner. I stood distinctly in awe of him at first, and I remember his amusement—and mine—when I discovered that a solemn-looking volume in which he had been absorbed for several evenings was not, as I had imagined, *The Works of St. Thomas Aquinas* or some Hebrew or Latin book, but a delightful collection of old *Punch* volumes of the John Leech period! I think that was the beginning of my real acquaintance with him. Later on he was enabled by means of a small portable instrument to hear quite well, and it was then that I realized the treasures with which his

mind was overflowing. The way he shared those treasures with others was one of his outstanding and most lovable characteristics. He never talked down to you. He always assumed that you were worthy of the best he had to give. Most of the really distinguished men and women I have met have had this trait in common.

I remember when I was quite a young woman visiting at a country house where political talk was the order of the day. It was at the time when Home Rule was engaging everyone's attention. Alas, it hadn't been engaging mine, and in that milieu I felt like an ignorant worm. Among the guests was Lord Spencer, who had, until quite recently, been Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. Even I knew that, but the knowledge shared with the crossing-sweeper and the organ-grinder isn't calculated to raise one to giddy heights even in one's own estimation. And one evening I found myself sitting next to him at dinner. This was the last straw. If the conversation turned upon Home Rule, as it invariably did, I knew I'd be done for. Thank goodness it didn't. I found him delightfully easy to get on with, and suddenly I thought to myself: "Here's my chance. I'll be a perfect idiot if I don't take it." Everyone was talking, and I felt sure I shouldn't be overheard, so I took the plunge and said straight out: "Lord Spencer, what *is* Home Rule? I know nothing about it. I wish you'd tell me."

To this day I remember the quick way he turned round and said quite simply and kindly: "Let me explain it to you." And he did, and so clearly that when I left the table with the other women I no longer felt like a worm, but like a cobra capella, capable of crushing anyone who should dare to disagree with me on a subject of which I knew just exactly nothing at all only half an hour before. The odd part was that I had really felt so ashamed of myself that I hadn't had the courage to confess my ignorance to a single

member of the house-party, some of whom I knew intimately. Yet I felt next to no reluctance when it was a question of exposing it to by far the most important person in the house.

But to be completely successful in the "crushing" business it is necessary to be fully qualified, otherwise the would-be "crusher" may easily find himself in the humiliating position of what, for want of a better word, I will call the "crushee." I once had an experience of that sort. It was when I first went to live in Broadway, where I had rented a tumble-down Tudor cottage next door to an old farm-house that the de Navarros had taken and were restoring. The same builder was at work on my cottage, and Mary (Mary Anderson that was) and I were continually in and out of our respective houses to see how he and his workmen were getting on. They certainly were not working at lightning speed, and I went to live on the first floor of my cottage long before the rooms on the ground floor were ready. And now to make a clean breast of it. I was secretly consumed with jealousy of Mary, who stood high in the estimation of Grimmett—the master-builder. As far as I could make out she was his equal—if not his superior—in all matters relating to the building of a house. She knew all about lintels and jambs and girders and joists, and what is more, never mistook one for the other, and always called them by their right names, which I never did, not even by chance. I called them "those things" or something equally inadequate, and never even attempted to cope with them. But one day I felt triumphant. I had got hold of a professional word that actually stuck in my memory. Grimmett had said to me: "Your cottage will be ready in about a week, Ma'am; there's only the by-boards want putting up." I hadn't the faintest idea what he meant, nor did I ask for an explanation, and in that moment unwittingly prepared the way for another "Mary" triumph. That same morning she paid me

a visit, and the following conversation is—more or less—a sample of the one that took place between us.

MARY: When in the world is Grimmett going to finish your cottage? Why don't you hurry him up?

I: *It is finished.* (*Carelessly*) That is to say, he's only got to put up the by-boards.

MARY: The by-boards? What *do* you mean?

I (*purring with inward satisfaction*): What do I mean? (*In a very superior tone of voice*): I mean exactly what I say. Don't you know what by-boards are?

Mary looked puzzled; then she said emphatically: "I never heard of such a thing."

I (*raising my eyebrows*): Well, my dear, whether you have or whether you haven't, Grimmett is going to put them up this afternoon and then you'll be able to see what they are.

She still looked incredulous, as who should say: "Who is Grimmett? What is he?" I began to feel that I wasn't going to get the better of her. It was maddening.

I (*resisting an impulse to tear her limb from limb*): I suppose Grimmett knows what he's talking about, and I'm simply repeating *his own words* to me.

Alas, I must have glanced at the window as I spoke, for Mary looked in the same direction, and then she began to laugh.

I (*very grandly*): I must say I'd like to know what you are laughing at.

MARY (*still laughing*): I'm laughing at you and your *by-boards*. I suppose you mean the boards for the *bay-window*.

After three or four weeks at the von Hügels' I went down to Broadway to stay with the de Navarros. When in 1901 I gave up the pretty cottage in which I had lived next door to them for several years, they

took over my lease, and it now forms part of Court Farm, their own picturesque old place.¹ A beautiful oak-panelled music-room with a gallery, which was the connecting link between both houses, added immensely to its attraction, and the alterations and additions had been carried out with such unusual success that they had in nowise altered the old-world look of either house from the outside. Not for a moment would any passer-by have suspected the existence of the new room, or of the changes inside: central heating, and electric light had been laid on, and though I sincerely mourned the partial disappearance of one of my old sitting-rooms, still there was no doubt that the whole place had been immensely improved. The new music-room with its outlook on to the garden and the hills beyond was really beautiful, especially on summer mornings when it was flooded with sunshine. But it was equally beautiful, though in a very different way, on autumn evenings when the lovely old curtains, green and gold, that had once belonged to Marie Antoinette, were drawn across the faithfully reproduced old Tudor windows. In front of these stood a long oak refectory table, which at this season was always laden with bowls of chrysanthemums, red, white, deep rose, gold, amethyst—a lovely splash of colour! Wide-spreading branches glowing with warm, rich tints, and tall jars of Michaelmas daisies greeted you in every direction, the dark walls in the background throwing up and emphasizing their beauty. Sometimes as I sat there working or reading, my armchair drawn up close to the huge fireplace in which the logs lay burning on a soft bed of silver-grey ashes, it seemed to me that although the owners of this room were not English, it was only in England that one ever met with just that mixture of luxury and comfort.

With characteristic kindness I was given my own

¹ Since then they have bought the whole place and a good deal of the surrounding land.

old bedroom; the room that had formerly been my study and in which I had composed so many of the songs that Harry Plunket Greene and Bertie Rumford were singing all over England was also put at my disposal. It still contained a grand piano, though the shelves on the walls were no longer filled with books and music, but with a small collection of old pewter, which to-day has grown into one of the most valuable in England. Tony de Navarro not only understands and loves his subject, but he is able to write about it in very beautiful English, and his articles on pewter, which have appeared from time to time in *Country Life* with illustrations from this collection, are not only full of knowledge, but full of poetry and delicate imagery. On several occasions while reading these articles, I have lost all sense of the present day, so completely have I been carried away. In describing some of the old pewter Church vessels and household utensils that had come into his possession, his choice of words was so happy, so subtly had he enveloped them in the atmosphere of the past, that with every sentence, a picture of medieval England was suggested to the mind; the England of pre-Reformation churches and monasteries, of old castles and manor-houses, where those chalices and thuribles, those ewers and basins, those goblets and old salt-cellars had been so happily at home. The romance, the curious pathos of these inanimate objects transplanted so far from their original surroundings, stamped themselves indelibly on my mind, for with a touch bordering on genius he had imbued each one with life.

My health had profited so much by the past winter in Sicily that before leaving Taormina I had arranged to return there in October. I had no home, no ties in England. My brothers and sisters were scattered all over the world, leading their own lives; I could go on with my work wherever I went, and—I was

middle-aged, and glorying in the fact! For middle-age—even now—is the most successful broom for sweeping tiresome complications out of a woman's life, and into how many women's lives has it not swept beautiful and faithful friendships, both with men and other women? It ought to be welcomed with cheers—with the enthusiasm with which Moham-medans celebrate the end of Ramadan. As to the "first grey hair," why, it's the outward and visible sign of liberty!—the liberty that refuses to be cramped and controlled by other people's opinions, but that is perfectly willing to be controlled by what Almighty God expects of His children.

I left England about the middle of August, and spent some time in Lucerne on my way to Como, where I was to stay with a certain Colonel G—— and his Austrian wife at their villa on the lovely lake. This villa was close to the Villa Taglioni which had formerly been the summer home of the famous dancer. History has a way of repeating itself, and once again I found myself in circumstances calculated to distress Mrs. Grundy—who at that time was still alive, though she had begun to show one or two pleasant symptoms of approaching dissolution. Privately I thought she would make "a lovely corpse."

Just before I started from Lucerne I received a letter from R. H., who was at Como himself, telling me that the mother of Signora G—— had most inopportunately chosen the moment fixed for my visit to develop a disease which she feared might prove fatal, in consequence of which she had telegraphed for her daughter, who had already hurried off to Vienna leaving a message to say she hoped I would not allow her absence to interfere with my plans. He went on to say that if I *did* still think of coming I could lunch and dine with him and spend most of my time at his place.

I must explain that I was to have stayed *en pension* with the Colonel and his wife, acquaintances

of R. H., who was spending part of the summer on the lake in a tiny but enchanting little cottage at the far end of their garden.

It didn't take me long to make up my mind. If Signora G—— had no objection to my sharing the villa with the military companion of her life, no more had I. I went to Cook's office and bought a ticket for Como from a young man who didn't know much about his business, for he told me to travel by a slow train, *assuring me that it was the express*, and that it was the only train by which it was possible to get from Lucerne to Como. The consequence was that I arrived at about five o'clock in the afternoon instead of at one p.m. As I had told R. H. that I was coming by the express, he very kindly came down to meet it, and still more kindly, feeling sure that there must be a mistake somewhere, waited to see if I should turn up by the slow train, which of course I did. When I found that he had been waiting, with a boat in readiness, for four mortal hours, I was really horrified. I am afraid that the milk of even *his* human kindness (which is coated by a good deal of thick cream) was in the act of turning, when I jumped gaily out of the train, quite unaware of the real situation. But it was only when we reached the landing-stage and I said, pointing to the boat that I had kept waiting all the afternoon, "Is *that* what we are going in?" that he gave vent to his pent-up feelings and behaved like a snake-charmer with a snake at his disposal—in a word, he bit my head off. "Yes," he said, in a voice that seemed to proceed from an outraged icicle lodged in the heart of a volcano just about to erupt, "*that's* what we're going in. Have you any objection? Were you expecting a flotilla to escort you up the lake?"

By the time we reached the villa the atmosphere had cleared, and the whole crew—which included his servant, Pietro, and another boatman—was in the best of tempers. After I had been introduced to Colonel

G——, who was a miniature replica of Vittorio Emanuele, and whose face was adorned with a ferocious moustache of a length very nearly equal to his height, I accompanied R. H. to his cottage, where we dined together.

Pietro was not only a boatman; he was also an extremely efficient parlourmaid and housemaid. In fact, on one occasion he discharged his duties as housemaid on so grandiose a scale that I feel his conduct ought to be recorded as a golden example to all members of that profession. R. H. had invited me to tea to meet a French friend of his, a certain Madame de C—— who was staying at the Villa d'Este, the beautiful hotel on the opposite side of the lake. I accepted the invitation, but when I came round to luncheon I found the whole place looking as if it had been visited by a typhoon. Chairs and tables were standing upside down in the garden, carpets and rugs lay prone on the gravel paths, in fact everything except the kitchen range had been hurled into the open. The cottage had been completely disembowelled, and when I went into the sitting-room I found R. H. sitting like a male Dido, *not* among the ruins, but among—nothing at all!

“What on earth is the matter?” I asked. “Why is the cottage being dismantled? I thought Madame de C—— was coming to tea.”

R. H. smiled wearily. “So she is,” he said. “Pietro is getting the house ready to receive her. He is spring-cleaning it from top to bottom in her honour. He started in at six o'clock this morning with the cook's bedroom.”

I began to laugh—there were only four rooms in the house including the kitchen, and they were all tiny.

“But when do you think he will have finished?” I asked.

“He hopes that everything will be ready by four o'clock if the toothpicks arrive in time!”

He must have rowed into Como to order a special brand, for he was nowhere to be seen.

I can't think what arguments were put forward by Pietro's *padrone*, but the toothpicks were *not* on the table when Madame de C—— and I turned up to tea. Whatever those arguments may have been I am quite sure they didn't hurt Pietro's feelings. R. H. was so kind to his servants that they themselves informed everyone of the fact, so much so that once, in Taormina, I heard an American man say, much to my amusement: "I'd rather be Hichens' discharged cook than anyone I know, for the last old woman he was obliged to get rid of, as she couldn't cook and wasn't even clean, departed from his cottage on Monte Ziretto staggering under the weight of all the presents he had given her to soften the blow."

My last day at the Villa G—— was heralded in by a catastrophe. Every morning during my visit my india-rubber bath had been prepared for me by the Colonel's soldier servant, who, up to this time, had performed the duties of lady's maid in the most exemplary fashion. But on this *giorno d'orrore* he poured a huge bucket of water into the india-rubber bath in such a way that the bath crumpled up and collapsed. So did he. So did I. So did everything. I was really desperate. There wasn't even time for him to ladle the water out of the flooded room, for I had only just time to catch the train by which I was leaving for Milan, and I had to pack and dress, wading about the room to do so, and leaving the putting on of shoes and stockings until the last. How on earth I ever accomplished any of these things is a mystery to me. As a matter of fact, I wasn't fit to be seen. The woman has yet to be born who could have dressed herself properly in such circumstances, and every daughter of Eve whose gloves have suddenly given way at the finger-tips, or who discovers a hole in her stocking at an evening party, will know exactly how I felt when I finally put on my hat. As

I climbed the steep path that led through the woods to the high-road, where a carriage was waiting to take me to the station, I was on the verge of tears.

I was accompanied by R. H., who was also going to Milan on his way to England. We walked up the hill in dead silence, he leading the way, and I noticed that he was turning out his toes in what dancing-masters of the mid-Victorian days used to call "the first position." I suppose he felt that something *must* be done to haul me up from the abyss of dejection into which I had fallen, for when I asked him why he had adopted such an extraordinary way of walking he answered: "Because I think it looks so cheerful." Perhaps I would have felt less desperate if from the first moment of the disaster I also had turned out my toes, and remained in "the first position" till I had recovered from the shock. All things are possible.

That winter—1902-3—I made real friends with Mr. and Mrs. William Sharp, who were on a visit to Dutch friends, Monsieur and Madame Grandmont, at Roccabella, a charming villa with a large and well-filled library, not the least of its attractions. The garden, with its view over Etna and the sea, was separated from the carriage road by a low, uneven wall hung with flowers, and looked from outside like a jungle with its masses of semi-tropical trees. The name of William Sharp had not yet been publicly identified with that of Fiona McLeod, and it was only by the merest chance that I found out that they were one and the same person. He had just written one of his seal-stories, and had given it to a German lady to be typed. She happened to be staying with me at the time, and one of the words being illegible, she handed me the manuscript and asked if I could make it out. To be quite sure of the word I just glanced at the context, and in a flash I found myself in the very uncomfortable possession of a secret which I was never intended to know, and of which I would far

rather have remained in ignorance. But I had just been reading *The Sunset of Old Tales* with its curious seal-stories, and the Fiona McLeod touch in this one was quite unmistakable. I kept my knowledge to myself, but once or twice I was horribly embarrassed and felt very much like blurting out the truth.

One thing I should like to say before writing another word about him or his wife. I don't believe that any literary man was ever married to a more understanding, a more unselfish, or a more wholly sympathetic woman. She was a perfect companion to him and he knew her worth. I once saw him look at her with a tenderness that touched me to the heart. I suppose there are ups and downs in all married lives, but the memory of a look like that would compensate a loving woman for a good many "downs."

And he was not the only man who found her sympathetic, for once, when they were travelling in the Algerian Desert, a Sheik in whose eyes she had found favour, offered him the finest camel in his herd in exchange for her. Mr. Sharp, however, preferred to keep his wife to himself, and as far as I know didn't even "sleep on the offer" before declining it. I remember how he laughed when he told me the story. "Just imagine," he said, "how people would have gossiped had I returned to our flat with a camel on my arm instead of Elizabeth!"

But what an unparalleled advertisement it would have been!

I saw him very often that winter, and constantly met him and his wife at luncheon or tea. I had taken a small house at the far end of the town opposite the Church of San Domenico, where he would sometimes come and see me, and specially remember one day when we spent an hour or two on my balcony and watched the sun go down, in a blaze of glory, behind Etna, and talked about anything and everything that came into our heads. And what came into *his* head was indeed worth listening to. His conversation held

the attention, no matter what the topic. There wasn't anything of the "highbrow" about him. He was far too full of the joy of life; everything seemed ten times more interesting when he talked about it and when the light of his mind illuminated what were often dark places to me. He was a profound lover of nature. There we met on common ground. But I loved her chiefly for the throbbing ecstasy she awoke in me, for the sheer splendour of her beauty which always seemed to me like overwhelming emotion translated into luminous days and starry nights, into the murmur of the sea and blue mountains and the breath of soft caressing winds and the smell of damask roses, and that I tried to express in music in some of my songs: "Es muss doch Frühling werden" and "Sotto le stelle." But he not only loved nature, he seemed to know her secrets; it was as if she in some special way belonged to him and he to her. I loved to hear him talk about trees, and flowers, and birds; it was like obtaining a glimpse into another world; he knew and loved them as other people love their dearest friends.

In the *Memoir* compiled by his wife, she quotes the letter of a friend, who says of him that he was "almost encumbered by the infinity of his perceptions, by the thronging interests, intuitions, glimpses of wonders, beauties and mysteries which made life for him a pageant and a splendour." . . . Those words seem to me a perfect portrait of the inner man. And yet how full of humour he was! No schoolboy enjoyed a joke more than he did. I have here, in my study in Florence, a large photograph of him taken by Sir Alex. Hood, with a dedication which to the uninitiated must indeed seem odd, but which is connected with the following story. As it isn't particularly to the credit of two of the people who figure in it, I will mention no names.

He once received a letter from a certain lady asking him to review a book which she considered

very remarkable. She said she knew nothing at all about the author, so he might rest assured that her admiration was quite unbiassed by any personal feeling. The book duly arrived. It was written under a pseudonym; but when he found out that the writer was closely related to the lady, this so annoyed him that he refused to have anything to do with it. After a day or two he received a letter from the author. It began in a way that was, to say the least of it, a trifle unceremonious, for he addressed him as "Sir—and Pig!"

With William Sharp's keen sense of humour he could hardly fail to enjoy what had evidently been intended to lay him in the dust, and naturally he took no notice of it. But at a private view of the Royal Academy that same year, a young man almost threw himself into his arms with expressions of the greatest cordiality. Mr. Sharp, detaching himself from his embraces, said: "Stop a moment. Are not you the young man who wrote me a letter some time ago, addressing me as 'Pig'?"

The young man burst forth into explanations: "No, no, Mr. Sharp. I protest—I did *not* address you as 'Pig.' I addressed you as '*Sir and Pig*' . . . ! *SIR and Pig!*'"

On the photograph he gave me is written:

" To Maude V. White
From William Sharp,
Sir—and Pig."

A good deal went out of many of our lives when he died in 1905 at Maniace, the home of Sir Alex. Hood, than whom a kinder and more faithful friend it would indeed be difficult to find. His chivalrous friendship never failed anyone who stood in need of it. He was devoted to William Sharp and his wife, and was with them when the latter died on a visit to his house.

MY INDIAN SUMMER

William Sharp is buried among the pine trees in the garden behind the old monastery castle, and surrounded by the almond trees he loved so much, and on a Celtic cross, these words have been engraved (they were chosen by his wife):

“Farewell to the known and exhausted.
Welcome to the Unknown and Unfathomed.”

—W. S.

and

“Love is more great than we conceive,
And Death is the Keeper of unknown Redemptions.”

—F. M.

CHAPTER FIVE

ARTHUR LYTTTELTON and his wife and half-sister spent some weeks of that winter in Taormina at the Hôtel Timeo. I had never met them before, but I had known his brothers Spencer and Alfred for so long that soon after their arrival we all made friends. He, poor man, was very ill, and I think he must have dreaded the idea of dying abroad, for he suffered terribly from nostalgia and longed to be back in England. Even the exquisite beauty of a Sicilian spring said little or nothing to him; his wife told me that he would sometimes cry: "Oh, for the sight of a moor, for the smell of the heather!" One must have gone through the same thing to be able to understand the paralysing effect that home-sickness can have upon the brain, which concentrates so fiercely on one subject that it is incapable of dwelling on any other for more than a few minutes at a time. I had been through a similar experience on board ship when, after my mother's death, I travelled to Chile. I felt a great compassion for him, and was quite thankful when an occasion arose which enabled me to do him a trifling service. Having heard by chance how much he disliked the rather coarse bread, which at that time was the only sort available in Taormina, I taught my cook to make scones, which we sent him every morning during the remainder of his visit.

Just before they left they came to luncheon at my little house, and I remember his pleasure on finding himself in a room which in its arrangement no doubt reminded him somewhat of England. It really was a dear little room. When I took the house, although it was only for six months, I made up my mind to

make the sitting-room as pretty as possible. I recollect picking a lemon off the tree and telling the workmen I had engaged to paint the walls exactly the same colour. Then I put up curtains the colour of its leaf. The doors and bookshelves were cream-coloured, and two earthenware jars, of the "Forty Thieves" type, stood at each end of the bookcase behind the piano. In the spring these jars were filled with great branches of almond blossom or long sprays of lilac sent to me from Maniace by Mr. Hood, who was always so willing to share the good things he possessed with his friends. Real old Sicilian pottery is very decorative, and I had several jars that were always filled with roses or freesias or whatever flower happened to be in season. It isn't difficult to make a room liveable and lovable when it is always flooded with sunshine; when masses of flowers are always at your disposal; when books are not only plentiful, but look as if they themselves had thoroughly enjoyed being read and appreciated; where a piano suggests that music can be had at any moment, and where you have only to step on to the balcony to enjoy one of the finest views in Europe.

I can see poor, delicate Arthur Lyttelton now as he stood on the threshold of that little room, which must have made an immediate appeal to him, as a room in a private house so often does when one is living in an hotel—for he looked round it with an almost happy smile on his face and said: "Can you lend me some books?" adding, before I had time to answer him: "I would like some good novels." Perhaps he thought that as he was a clergyman I might imagine it necessary to offer him something very serious and solemn, when he was really longing for something that would take him out of himself.

I wonder whether any of us recognize the tremendous debt of gratitude we owe to the men and women who write really good novels. When the mind is in the grip of some horrible anxiety, or

obsessed by the recollection of some disaster, or when it must be prevented at all costs from brooding incessantly over some irremediable loss, how often has not the kindest, the most sympathetic friend felt unequal to the task. It is then that the right sort of novel can really work wonders. Only last year I had a proof of that myself when, one afternoon, a friend who was staying with us, and of whom we were all fond, was found dead in his room. It was a dreadful shock to everyone in the house, and for days and days I could think of nothing else. I found it quite impossible to detach my mind from what had impressed it so painfully. At last I felt almost desperate. I longed to lose myself in work, but all my efforts were unsuccessful. I couldn't even read more than a page or two at a time. But one day, on looking through my books, I noticed Tolstoy's famous novel *War and Peace* on one of the shelves. I hadn't read it for years and years, though I well remembered how it had held me. Taking down the first volume, hoping and praying that it might have the same effect on me, I began to read. And as if by magic I was immediately transported into the totally different atmosphere of another century, of another country, where tremendous things were happening, and my attention was arrested so forcibly that when I laid the book down the miracle had been accomplished. The sad and only picture that had hung on the wall of my mind for so many days was now surrounded by a hundred others. Tolstoy's master hand had painted them in colours so rich and glowing, so unerringly had he chosen the subjects that appeal to mankind for all time, that it was impossible to ignore them.

And that day I realized that *War and Peace* belongs to the immortal books of the world, that it will hold its own for ever. Published in 1869, its appeal after sixty years has lost none of its vigour, none of its freshness, and the adverse criticisms that have been launched against it from time to time can no more

affect such a book than the waves of an angry sea can affect the lighthouse that towers above them. It isn't in their power to extinguish the powerful light that is projected from its lantern, and it isn't in any man's power to put out the blazing torch with which Tolstoy has illuminated once and for all the innermost recesses of the human heart.

I don't remember the names of the books I lent Mr. Lyttelton, but if one is a real lover of one's kind, and animated by honest sympathy, I am perfectly certain that the same instinct which would prompt one to lend *War and Peace* to one person would most assuredly suggest lending to another . . . shall we say *The Trials of Topsy*, specially recommending the two chapters on "Good Works" and "Reducing." I read them on a day that ought to have been ashamed of itself for dawning on Italy—dark, dismal, bitterly cold, and altogether hateful—but I soon forgot all about it, for Topsy's eloquent details of her various experiences made me laugh till I ached. William Sharp, who sometimes lent me books, once sent up a large packet with a note saying: "You will find all sorts of books inside, but as you are the most omnivorous reader I have ever come across, I know you will enjoy them all." Two of them I remember; one was an English translation from the Greek of some charming little scenes in Syracuse by—I think—Moschus; the other was a historical novel by Juliette Adam, the daughter of Théophile Gautier, and was called *La Conquête du Paradis*. The scene was laid in Madras and Pondichery in the time of Louis XIV, and the book was full of colour and romance.

For six months I stayed quietly in Taormina, though I was again invited to Biskra and longed to go; but it wasn't possible just then. The book of my life has been punctuated chiefly by commas, or perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say by *dashes*,

here, there, and everywhere, but a full-stop has sometimes been printed in large type in the only book I have never been able to appreciate, for it is full of depressing details. I allude to my pass-book. A pass-book suggests a bank, and a bank suggests—to me—Messrs. Coutts & Co., and I should like to publish in red letters the never-failing kindness that has been shown to me by every member of that famous bank with whom I have had the good fortune to be personally acquainted. One of them once summed me up very accurately, for he wrote me a letter which began like this: “Dear Miss White, It is about time that we made up your pass-book. Have a hunt for it. . . .” He assumed, as a matter of course, that it was lost; and so it was, though I believe it was eventually excavated from beneath a pile of music paper.

Another time, just before starting from South America, many years ago, I received a letter from an old member of the staff, Mr. Hornby, who had daughters of my own age, in which he said: “You don’t seem to have much of a balance at the bank, and I am so afraid you may perhaps need money before you reach your relatives in Valparaiso that I have ventured to place ten pounds to your credit at our agents in Rio Janeiro, which I hope you will use in case of necessity.” That letter touched me to the bottom of my heart. I need hardly say I didn’t take advantage of my dear old friend’s kindness, but it is the sort of thing one remembers throughout life even if one has a memory like a sieve. Mr. William Wakefield, the father of my friend Mary Wakefield, and himself a banker, opened an account for me with Messrs. Coutts when I was a young girl, and from that day to this everyone who has looked after my very unimportant affairs has shown me unvarying kindness and consideration.

That same winter a concert was given in Taormina. A young Danish singer in very straightened circum-

stances was anxious to raise the money to pay for her journey home, and concert-mongering being a side profession of my own, I offered to assist her by accompanying her, by playing a solo, and by broadcasting the news among the people with whom I was acquainted. I little knew what I was letting myself in for. But as they say in melodramas: "More of this anon!"

A good many people were wintering in Taormina that year. The Duchess of Sutherland was at the Villa Santa Caterina with a large house-party which included Baroness von Hindenburg, née Marie Hay, married to a distant cousin of the famous General Hindenburg, and the author of several interesting historical novels—*A German Pompadour*, *Masaniello*, etc. Many of the villas were occupied; English and American visitors filled the hotels, and last, but not least, the Danish *pension* was overflowing with the concert-giver's compatriots, who would be sure to turn up in full force at the Teatro Margherita, where the concert was to take place. Some of these Danish women were eccentric-looking creatures. They refused to dress like their sisters of every other nation, and wore what they called "Reform Kleider"—hideous, shapeless woollen garments the reverse of alluring. Venus herself would have been unrecognizable had she risen from the waves in a tweed nightgown several sizes too large for Mr. Chesterton—or myself—and a diminutive hat suggestive of Charlie Chaplin. She would certainly have been hissed off her shell by every spectator on the shore, and would only have got what she deserved. But as far as my experience goes—and I've known a great many beautiful women—the loveliest among them would never dare to dress in garments such as some plain and unattractive people array themselves in without a qualm, or even a suspicion that their appearance is not all that might be desired. However, as things turned out, the female contingent of the

Danish *pension* were the only people who arrived at the concert suitably dressed for the occasion. Their nightgown dresses matched the program, which consisted almost entirely of Cradle-songs, Wiegenlieder, Lullabies and Berceuses. My dismay can be imagined when, shortly before the concert, I realized the situation. To have gone into the highways and by-ways of Taormina in order to compel people to take tickets at five lire each, simply and solely to inoculate them with the germs of sleeping-sickness, was altogether beyond a joke. No artistes, whether they hail from the shores of the Skager Rack, or the borders of the Thames, have the right to turn a concert-hall into a lethal chamber.

I felt very much like the Italian husband of an Austrian friend of mine who killed his wife's favourite cat while she was on a visit to her mother in Vienna. When she wrote and told me what he had done she said: "I must say I do not call this very well-bred of him." I was entirely of her opinion. I felt anything but well-bred myself when I reflected on the share I was taking in this entertainment, for a song of my own was to be sung by the concert-giver called "To a little child," which began, "Oh sleep, my soul's baby!" I was just as guilty as the rest of them. It would be my fault, as much as theirs, if everyone began to yawn before the concert was half over. It was too late to change the program though there was still time to rush two or three hundred beds down to the Teatro Margherita, so that if the worst came to the worst, and the audience *did* go to sleep, they might do so in perfect comfort. But I hadn't the spirit to carry out this plan. And the audience would have to face the music (in more senses than one), and so, alas! would I.

When I reached the artists' room, none of the performers assembled there showed the slightest signs of perturbation. They were evidently unaware that there was anything unusual about the program they

had concocted, and it was best to leave them in their ignorance.

And the concert began.

Someone stepped on to the platform and sang:
 "Dormez, dormez, ma belle! Dormez, dormez,
toujours!"

As it was still early in the evening none of the ladies present thought it necessary to carry out these instructions. I forget what came next, but presently a lady came forward and wished everyone "Good evening," and "Good night." Nor did she limit herself to these friendly greetings, but actually invited the audience to slip under some wholly invisible counterpane!

"Guten Abend Gut Nacht," she whispered,
 "Schlüpf unter die Deck."

After a few more cradle-songs, the applause grew fainter and fainter, and the audience looked bored to death. I can't say that I actually saw anyone drop off to sleep in the front seats, though they had been implored to do so by one singer after another, but heaven alone knows what was happening in the boxes. Things reached a climax when the *prima donna*, who was rather pretty, addressed the whole crowd as her "soul's baby" and entreated them to shut their "blue eyes," which by this time they were on the verge of doing! There was a trickle of applause as we left the platform, and to my dying day I shall regret that I followed in her wake instead of remaining behind and interrupting it by singing (*sotto voce*) the refrain of a music-hall ditty that was popular all over England when I was in my twenties:

"Don't make a noise
 Or else you'll wake the baby."

(N.B.—In case these pages should meet the eye of anyone who took part in this concert, I must ask them to excuse me if my memory has proved a trifle less

reliable than my imagination. But I can swear to my own song, and to the soporific nature of theirs.)

Close to the house where I was living was a little spit of land on whose extreme edge stood a tiny chapel that had fallen into disuse. Mass was no longer allowed to be celebrated within its walls, and the doors were always kept locked; no one was permitted to go inside as the building was no longer considered safe. A rumour reached me that it was to be pulled down, and that a German *pension* was to be erected in its place. Architecturally it was of no value whatsoever, but its whitewashed walls and diminutive tower fitted into the view to perfection. Its tiny proportions and absolute simplicity were like the brevity and simplicity of a little child's prayer and equally touching. It distressed me to think that its fate was in the balance, and I inquired if it might be allowed to remain standing if it were put in order. To my delight I received a satisfactory answer from the authorities, and at once proceeded to raise the funds (but *not* by a concert!) to carry out the necessary work, assisted in this by two kind and clever Englishmen, lovers of art though not professional artists. I have, unfortunately, forgotten their names, which I very much regret.

In a very short time the little chapel was not only made safe again, but the interior was freshened up entirely in harmony with its modest exterior, and once more it stood fit for public worship. The first day on which Mass was said there, the door of the chapel had been left wide open and the congregation had overflowed on to the grass that grew to its threshold. As they stood there among the Fichi d'India and under the shadow of what was formerly the monastery of San Domenico, they could at almost one and the same moment see the priest at the altar and the sea and Etna beyond. The peasants of whom the congregation chiefly consisted, with a sprinkling

MY INDIAN SUMMER

of some of the poorest of the poor, behaved in characteristic Sicilian fashion. Those who were seated in the first three rows of chairs behaved quite reverently; those who had settled down in the next three rows evidently looked upon the ceremony as a capital opportunity for indulging in friendly conversations which they carried on without even attempting to lower their voices. As for the last three rows of chairs, they were being fought for tooth and nail.

The attitude of the poor classes of Sicily when in church certainly *laisse à désirer*. I suppose the fact that they feel so absolutely at home there in itself accounts for their almost total lack of outward reverence. Yet there is a reverence of the heart, and a singularly touching quality in their absolute faith in God—quite apart from superstition—which it is impossible to doubt.

The most unexpected scenes sometimes occur in church, and the protagonists are usually women, young and old, and small boys. I was once the perfectly innocent cause of a regular rumpus. One Sunday, on arriving at the Duomo, I found that the seat I usually occupied (but to which I had no more right than anyone else) had been taken by a little boy who had evidently not put the finishing touches to his toilet in front of a long glass: buttons were conspicuous by their absence; they are, however, looked upon as superfluous luxuries in some Taormina circles. My sense of decorum is always in a state of coma in Sicily, and I was neither shocked nor surprised. And as I didn't particularly care where I sat, I took the seat in front of him. But suddenly I nearly jumped out of my skin. A mother—or a grandmother—had appeared on the scene and with loud imprecations had seized the child's arm, which she was apparently doing her best to dislodge from its socket. She was hurting the little fellow so much that I turned round and protested, when she suddenly shed a flood of light upon her conduct. She accused him of

having behaved with unheard-of presumption, and a *Mancanza d'educazione* (the crime of crimes in Sicily) that cried aloud for vengeance. "He had the audacity to take your seat," she said indignantly. "Your seat, Vossia! Come back and sit in it." It was only after protestations on my part, almost as loud as her own, that the poor child was left alone. But when peace had been restored I felt as if I owed her an apology. After all, according to her rather lurid lights, the poor old thing had behaved with unqualified *educazione* to me!

On another occasion, a little orphan boy about six years old appeared at High Mass in the Duomo wearing a large cocked hat made of newspaper. Fortunately for him, his grandmother—his only relation—was bed-ridden and unable to keep an eye on him. As he strutted up the church with his nose in the air, the excitement of the congregation can be imagined, and if they laughed they were hardly to be blamed. I knew the little fellow's grandmother. She told me he was her sole attendant and performed his duties admirably, but no doubt he kept her in ignorance of the fact that he led a double life—that of a male nurse and an imaginary Admiral of the Fleet!

The following year when I had forgotten all about my share in the restoration of the little chapel and was again wintering at the Hôtel Timeo, I met an old Sicilian during an early morning walk who recalled it to my mind. He greeted me in so friendly a fashion that I was quite taken by surprise; I didn't remember having ever seen him before. Of course I returned his greeting, and then he informed me that his professional career was that of a scavenger.

"You don't know me," he said, "but I know you. You gave us back our little church"; and then he made the following speech, the first part of which I have proved again and again to be true, as far as the poorer classes in Taormina are concerned.

"We Taorminese never forget those who have

been kind to us." Then, after a slight pause, and in a voice which struck me as almost sinister, he added: "And we never forget those who have done us harm."

I went by the name of "La Whitey" among my poor friends, and missives that I received from time to time from those who knew how to write were generally addressed to "La Signora Ouaité!" But sometimes I was promoted to the ranks of the aristocracy. One morning I was invited to breakfast by the Mother Superior of the picturesque Cappuccini Convent. She was a charming and extremely nice-looking middle-aged woman, and I accepted her invitation with pleasure.

As soon as I had taken my seat at the table, one of the Sisters said to me: "Would you like coffee or chocolate, Signora Principessa?"

I explained that I was not a princess.

"Scusi tanti, Signora Duchessa——"

"Oh," I said, laughing, "I'm not a duchess either."

She looked very much surprised, but when she had got down to "Signora Baronessa," and I told her that I possessed no title whatsoever, adding, "Sono proprio niente,"¹ she became almost dumb with surprise, though she wound up by saying quite firmly:

"That is simply impossible."

I assured her it was quite possible in my country, but I don't know whether I succeeded in convincing her. The truth is that in Sicily the merest nobodies are marquises and counts. Marion Crawford told me that once, when he was yachting along the coast of Calabria, he saw a small tower for sale. The mere fact of possessing it conferred the title of "Marchese" upon the owner. It was going so cheap that he said he felt inclined to buy it in order to make a present of it to his valet, just for the fun of being waited on by a marquis!

¹ "I am nothing at all."

But there is another side to the picture, a rather sad side. I know of a poor old cobbler, the last descendant of a famous ducal family. When he was pointed out to me, he was busily at work in a picturesque little garden belonging to one of the loveliest ruins in Sicily, a castle that dated from the time of the Saracen occupation!

When the six months' lease of my little house was drawing to a close, my landlady informed me that she expected me to leave the sitting-room in exactly the same condition in which I had found it on my arrival. I was rather amused, for it was like a pigsty when I took it. I told her I was sure I could oblige her if she would do me the favour of inviting four or five of the dirtiest boys in Taormina to spend the day there after I had removed my belongings. She looked fixedly at me for a moment, and then hurriedly left the room. She never reverted to the subject.

I again spent the summer at Como, at a villa that stood in the midst of a garden on the edge of the lake and under the shadow of the wooded mountains. My next door neighbour was the famous actress, Madame Ristori—in private life the Marchesa Capranica del Grillo—whose acquaintance I made one afternoon when I was asked to tea by her daughter, Donna Bianca del Grillo. I had seen Madame Ristori once before in the rôle of Lady Macbeth at Drury Lane in 1882. In a little volume published in 1888 by W. H. Allen & Co. she has written an extremely interesting account of the study she made of Lady Macbeth's character, and also explained how she interpreted it on the stage. She has written similar accounts of all the other parts she played.

"The Italian school of acting holds that one of the chief objects of the stage is to represent nature in a *living and truthful* manner." These are her own words, and she always endeavoured to live up to them. When I saw her in her villa at Como she struck me

chiefly as a very dignified old gentlewoman; there wasn't a trace of anything theatrical or artificial about her, and her daughter, who spoke English and French to perfection, was very attractive, and very graceful. It was the only time I ever saw them together. Madame Ristori died three years later, in 1906.

One day Robert Hichens, who was also staying on the lake, asked me if I had ever met Miss Ada Rehan. He was a great admirer of her acting, and liked her very much personally, and when I said I didn't know her, he said: "I am quite sure you would like her as much as I do. I wish you could meet each other." The next day we arranged to lunch together at a very modest little *trattoria* in the neighbourhood of Bellaggio, our great object being to avoid the rather tiresome stream of tourists that invades all the better known restaurants. We had hardly settled down at our little table when we were invited to join a party at a table close by, which to our surprise and pleasure consisted of Sir Eric and Lady Barrington and—Miss Ada Rehan! They had chosen this little *trattoria* with the same object as ourselves. I have noticed that when people try to avoid the same thing and—in doing so—come across each other, they invariably fraternize. We all got on so splendidly that before we parted we had arranged that they should lunch at the Villa Pedraglio that same week, and that R. H. should fetch them in the vaporino belonging to the Villa d'Este.

Sir Eric Barrington had just received a knighthood, and his letters had now to be addressed to "The Hon. Sir Eric Barrington." Unfortunately I had known his wife as "Mrs. Barrington" for some years, and couldn't accustom myself to think of her as anything else, and continued to address her as "Mrs." But the day before the luncheon party R. H. talked to me like a father, more in sorrow than in anger.

"If it is really a physical impossibility for you to

remember that she is no longer *Mrs.* Barrington, the best thing you can do is to say 'Lady Barrington' fifty times in succession when you say your prayers to-night. Perhaps that will impress it on your mind—not that *she* cares two straws, but still, as that is her name you may as well call her by it." I promised humbly to do my best, and shortly afterwards heard him tell the story to a friend. It wound up in the most unexpected way, for this is what I overheard:

"And what do you think happened when they *did* turn up at that luncheon party? Miss White walked straight up to Miss Rehan and said: 'How do you do, *Sir Ada.*'"

Miss Rehan was as interesting and *simpatica* as I had been led to expect, and I only wish I had been able to see more of her. But I never saw her again.

Sir Edward and Lady Poynter were among other people I met during that summer. They once came to tea at Villa Pedraglio to see R. H.'s dear old father who was an old friend of theirs, and who, with his daughter Margaret, and his son, were staying at the villa. Old Mr. Hichens was a Canon of Canterbury Cathedral. I was very fond of him; he was easy to get on with, clever and humorous. Before he came to stay at the villa R. H. said to me: "If you really want to give my father a good time, fill his room with interesting books, which he will sit reading from morning till night, *with his back to the view.*" But he didn't only sit reading books with his back to the view, for one day Pietro—of toothpick fame—who had accompanied me to the villa, not as housemaid, but as boatman, rushed into the sitting-room and informed R. H. that his father had jumped into the lake. He was evidently much upset, and wanted to know if he hadn't better jump in after him.

"Why should you?" asked R. H. calmly.

"Why," he shouted, "because if I don't the Reverendo will be drowned."

I'm sure he thought R. H. a most unnatural son,

till he heard to his amazement that the *vecchio Reverendo* could swim like a fish, and almost as well as himself.

My old friend, Colonel G——, at whose villa I had stayed the previous summer, sometimes rowed over with his wife to tea. During one of these visits I discovered that he had a strange monomania. His admiration for Monte Rosa was unbounded. He said it could only be seen to full advantage at sunset, and from one window alone, in the bathroom of his villa. Visitors were requested to call at that hour, when he himself ushered them into the *Sala di bagno*, where they were expected to remain, wrapped in ecstasy, until the sun had disappeared behind the famous mountain. He even maintained that a still finer view could be obtained from *inside the bath*, and that to sit in cold water up to your shoulders, with your eyes fixed on Monte Rosa, was a treat not to be surpassed by anything on earth. He begged me to call upon them at sunset, and obliged me to fix a day. I hadn't been in the house for more than a few minutes, when he himself took me up to the bathroom and left me there! I was only too thankful that he hadn't turned the tap on, and plunged me, *nolens volens*, into the bath, a prolonged immersion of cold water being, in my opinion, enough to cool one's admiration for anything or anybody! I escaped as soon as possible and never called there again at sunset!

The Colonel was very proud of his villa, his view, and his wife's English. He told me that they wished to let their villa, and that she had written an advertisement which she wished to have inserted in an English newspaper. He then produced the advertisement which began :

"This villa which stretches himself all along the beautiful Lake of Como," etc.

I don't know if they ever found tenants for it. Most people, I imagine, would think twice before taking a villa of such vast dimensions!

CHAPTER SIX

BEFORE I left Villa Pedraglio I was "laid low" with that horrible illness—shingles. I endured tortures, especially at night. No one knew what was the matter with me, for, strange to say, there were no exterior symptoms of any sort whatever, though one-half of my body was racked with pain. The local doctor was called in and proved quite useless. Meanwhile the weather had broken up. It was cold and rainy, and though I don't believe anyone could love Lake Como more than I do, I wasn't sorry to follow the advice of my friends, which was to leave before the lease was up, and to go to Milan to have really good medical treatment. I stayed for about three weeks at the Hôtel Cavour under the care of an excellent doctor until I had sufficiently recovered to undertake the journey to England. I engaged a sleeper as far as Paris, where I meant to stay for two or three days, and on the night of my departure was ushered into a compartment reserved for men! I couldn't imagine how the mistake had arisen, but it was my name "Maude" that was—and always is—a source of trouble. It is apparently beyond the power of anyone in Italy to cope with it, in consequence of which it was ignored, and a place had been reserved for M. V. White, which the conductor of the wagons-lits had interpreted as "*Monsieur V. White!*"

Fortunately an ordinary first-class carriage at the end of the corridor happened to be empty, and though I was done out of my sleeper I was extremely lucky in another respect.

Shortly after leaving Como, a French hospital nurse entered my carriage. She was a very agreeable

woman, and told me she had just come from North Africa, where she had been nursing a relative of the owner of the famous garden at Biskra. We entered into conversation, and when I said I was still suffering a good deal of pain, due to my recent illness, she told me of a very simple remedy for which I blessed her again and again during the following days. She advised me to take two—if not three—very hot baths a day, dissolving a large tin of starch into each bath, and continuing these baths until the pain was gone. When we arrived in Paris I bought half a dozen tins of starch before going to the Hôtel St. James in the rue St. Honoré, but I was so worn out that I tumbled into bed, and sent for the English doctor who had been so kind and good to me at the Hôpital St. Joseph in 1901. When he heard that I had had little or no sleep for nearly a month he said that I *must* have rest, and he gave me a dose of morphia in the hope of alleviating the pain that kept me awake. But even that didn't have the desired effect, and for the benefit of those who are tempted to take morphia in the belief that it only produces sensations of delight, I will record my own experience.

I hadn't been able to lie down in comfort for weeks, but that night I acknowledge gratefully that I was at last enabled to stretch my cramped and weary limbs in bed, although I never slept a wink and even had toothache! But it was next morning when I tried to get up that I had the most horrible experience of my life. All my will-power seemed to have forsaken me, and at last I sank back among the pillows like a log, though I was wide awake.

I tried to get up again towards noon—with the same result. I lay in bed, wishing to get up, but unable to carry out my own wishes. At last, at about three o'clock, I made another effort to move. I was so horrified at this disintegration of my will-power, I felt so degraded at not being able to do as I chose, that something deep down in me was stirred to fight.

I felt as if I should suffer the loss of some precious possession if I didn't get the best of this hideous apathy, for it was not pain or weakness that had overpowered me; I've been ill too often not to know that there are times when one *must* give in to the demands of the body, when it would be madness *not* to do so. But in this case I felt that I was becoming the prey of some evil and malignant influence against which I soon should be quite unable to struggle. I made a supreme effort and at last managed to get out of bed. Then I remembered the advice of the hospital nurse, and ordered a hot bath, into which I emptied one of the tins of starch that I had bought the day before. After several of these baths I began to feel so much better that I made up my mind to return to England, where I stayed for about two months.

I again spent the winter—of 1903-4—in Taormina, and paid another visit to Maniace, where I had rather an uncanny experience for which no one in the house was able to account, and which remained a mystery to me till four years later. I will defer all explanations for the present.

When I arrived there I found that I was again to occupy the large and comfortable room in the long corridor where I had slept on my last visit, and the knowledge that another of the guests had also been given a room in the same corridor took away some of the nervous feeling which always possesses me at night in a strange house—or in any house—when no one is within reach. I happened to be the only woman of the party, but this time neither I, nor anyone else, thought it necessary to do as kind Frank Schuster had done many years ago in Venice when all his women guests except myself had failed him (including my own sister), and when he had rushed round to call on all the “nice” women he knew, imploring them to call upon me at once, in order that I might feel less uncomfortable.

But even if Mr. Hood had wished to do so, I'm

afraid that scouring Bronte for suitable "lady-friends" would have proved an unprofitable task, if Verga is to be trusted, for in one of his inimitable sketches of Sicilian country life, he makes one of his characters describe not only a "nice," but a "perfect" woman, as one "*che non si lavava per non sporcare l'acqua.*"¹

It was about ten-thirty when we all retired for the night. As usual a splendid log fire was burning in the great fire-place in my room, and I noticed with satisfaction plenty of candles; there was also a clock on the table by my bed. I always read for a little while before settling down for the night, and I suppose it must have been about eleven-thirty when I put out the candle. Just as I was dropping off to sleep I was startled by a deep groan. Whoever was groaning was quite close to me. In that moment I realized that when people talk of their blood running cold they are not exaggerating in the least. I quickly lit the candle and looked round the room. My door was locked. I didn't see how anyone could have got in, and apparently no one had. But the groans continued. I glanced at the clock and saw that it was within three minutes of midnight. And then I jumped out of bed. I remember thinking: "If this groaning goes on, if it doesn't stop before I have done counting up to twenty, I shall awaken the guest in the next room." I was really terrified. When I had counted up to eighteen the groans suddenly ceased. I stood by the fire for a minute or two and piled on fresh logs—darkness would have been perfectly unendurable to me—and then went back to bed, where I lay awake longing for the morning. Suddenly I heard a bird twittering outside my window, which was close to the bed. How I blessed that little bird! A feeling of security came over me with the dawn, and I slept for a few hours.

When I met my neighbour the following morning I

¹ One who did not wash herself so as not to soil the water.

told him what had happened, and asked him if he had heard anything. But he had slept so soundly that he was quite unaware that anything unusual had occurred. When I told Mr. Hood he was very puzzled. I asked him if anyone slept in the room beneath mine, and if any of the servants had been taken ill. But he said that the room below was unoccupied, and that the servants were all perfectly well. He also told me that he had never heard the sounds I described. Evidently no one had been disturbed but myself. It was very strange.

The next night I heard the same groans, and what was really uncanny, they began at precisely the same hour as on the night before—within three minutes of midnight. My heart almost stood still. I again jumped out of bed, threw on my dressing-gown, and again made up my mind to count twenty before rousing my neighbour. He really was in luck, for the groans ceased when I had counted up to fifteen. And again I passed a wretched, sleepless night. I sympathized fully with an American girl I knew, who told me what she had felt like when a widower who liked her a great deal better than she liked him, had asked her to marry him. She refused to do so. "Oh," she said, "it was awful. When he asked me if I wouldn't be a mother to his little Johnny I *just wished I wasn't there.*" The only thing wherein we differed was, that if a whole regiment of widowers, accompanied by their offspring, had burst into my room that night, and had made me a similar offer, I would have been so thankful that I would have accepted them all!

I knew that the guest occupying the room in the same corridor as myself was leaving early the next morning, and I decided to leave that same day by a later train. I simply hadn't the courage to face that groaning for a third time without the knowledge that *someone* was within hail, if the worst came to the worst. Mr. Hood begged me to stay on, but I

refused. He then said he was returning to Taormina himself in two days, and was going to travel on the new Circum-Ætnean train that passes by a number of picturesque little towns perched on Etna, which he was anxious for me to see. At last, when he realized that nothing would induce me to remain, as I was really frightened, he asked me if I would change my mind if he himself moved for those two days into the room his guest had just vacated. Of course this made all the difference, and I stayed on. Nor did any horrid noises disturb my slumbers. In a word :

“ The groaners ceased from groaning,
And ‘ La Whitey ’ slept in peace.”

I think it was that same evening that he gave me a packet of letters to read. They were yellow with age. They were some of Lady Hamilton’s original letters to Lord Nelson, and among them was one from the Bourbon Queen of the Two Sicilies. The letters of both women touched me a good deal. Lady Hamilton’s spelling was often faulty, but there was a note of real admiration in her letters that more than made up for all deficiencies in that respect. The Queen wrote to thank him for having placed a ship at her disposal on which she and her children, accompanied by Lady Hamilton, fled from Naples to Palermo. Her outspoken and profound gratitude was unmistakable, though the journey was a sad one, for one of her children died in Lady Hamilton’s arms during the crossing.

When I had finished reading those letters, I couldn’t help thinking about the irresistible appeal that some people make to the hearts of their fellow-creatures. My grandfather, Daniel Harrington, a lieutenant on H.M.S. *Victory*, who was himself wounded at Trafalgar, wrote in his diary on the day of the battle that there wasn’t a man on board who wouldn’t gladly have given his life “ for his lordship.”

What is it that is able to command such unhesitating devotion? What is it that brings that "warm" sound into the voices of men and women when they pronounce certain famous names? What is it that makes the tears start to their eyes when speaking of certain people? Isn't it because apart from all his brilliant achievements, they are firmly convinced that their hero—to use a popular expression—is *one of the best*? And by that, don't they mean that he is fundamentally kind, that he doesn't give himself airs, that he doesn't make even the humblest of them feel that they are "beneath" him? Doesn't it mean that he has the adorable sense of brotherhood? I can't help thinking that it is the total absence of spiritual pride that makes *any* human being lovable, and worthy of love, though the imagination is stirred to still greater depths of admiration when that beautiful simplicity goes hand in hand with great genius, or an exalted position, or great personal beauty and charm, or any other gift that confers on its possessor an immense advantage over others. And when glorious and heroic deeds have been accomplished by such people, is it any wonder that the whole world takes them to its heart?

Yesterday, the 29th of March, 1929, was Good Friday. On that most sacred day a large crucifix lies on the steps that lead to the High Altar of every Catholic church in Christendom, and millions of kneeling men and women kiss the pierced feet that represent those of Him who hung upon the Cross to save us all. And on the arch above the High Altar of a church I know—and love—there is written one word in letters of gold—the word that stands for the virtue that is the source of all the moral beauty in the world: "HUMILITAS."

I have just read a life of Lady Hamilton by O. A. Sherrard, published by Sidgwick & Jackson in 1927, in which a statement has been made that is absolutely incorrect. The author of the book says that the annuity of £500 bequeathed to Lady Hamilton by

Lord Nelson was never paid to her. For several good reasons I strongly doubted the accuracy of this accusation. I now quote a letter written to me on the 20th of May, 1929, from the Castello di Maniace, Bronte, Sicily, by the Hon. Sir Alexander Nelson Hood, the present Duke of Bronte, in answer to one of my own, addressed to him on this subject, as it settles the question once and for ever :

“ This is what I have to say in answer to your questions, and you may make use both of it and my name as you wish. To the day of her death, Lady Hamilton, according to the terms of the Hero’s will, was paid and received from my great-grandfather, the second Lord Nelson, brother of the Hero, the sum of £125 per quarter or £500 per annum. I have all the receipts signed by her, not here, but in London. The terms of the Hero’s will were carried out. Merton became hers, but was swallowed up by her heedless ways, but she had £500 a year until her death in Calais, where she lies in an unknown grave, poor thing. . . .

“ Your affectionate old friend,
“ BRONTE.”

That summer I received the welcome news that my sister Emmie was coming to Europe for a change, travelling from Chile with one of our nephews who was coming home to be married. I was overjoyed, as I hadn’t seen her for some years. Her husband, detained in Chile on business, was unable to accompany her, so I knew that for the greater part of the time I should have her all to myself. A dear old friend of ours, Harry Humphreys, who had spent most of his life in Egypt, where he worked in the Survey Department, was very anxious that we should spend two or three weeks of his leave with him in Switzerland, and suggested that we should all meet at Lucerne on a certain date. We had both known

him from his little childhood. My sister had been to school in Paris with his elder sisters, and we often used to go and stay with them at their home on the outskirts of Leamington. On one of these visits I remember him, a small boy, in a little white night-shirt, flitting anxiously from room to room saying: "Won't anyone hear me say my prayers?" I offered to do so, and from that day to this we have been fast friends. Never have I known anyone with such a delicious sense of humour, nor do I remember it deserting him for any length of time, except on one occasion when for a few days he gave up smoking and developed into a hopeless pessimist. I certainly didn't recognize my cheery friend, who even when he was threatened (comparatively young) with baldness, merely informed me that he still had two hairs on his head to which he had given the names of William and Mary. His only fear was that Mary would be a widow ere long.

I tried to rouse him from the Slough of Despond into which he was sinking deeper and deeper every hour, but my efforts were so unsuccessful that I determined to follow the advice once given me by an old servant of the de Navarros concerning the tactful treatment of the male sex in certain circumstances. She was a married woman and spoke from long experience.

"When men's upset," she said, "just you leave them to grizzle by themselves."

H. H. and I met on the appointed day at Lucerne, at the Hôtel National, where we expected my sister to arrive that evening. But she was detained, first in England and then in Jersey, where she went to visit my eldest sister, and to our unmitigated disappointment she wrote to say she would not be able to join us, but would meet me in about ten days in Bern, where my doctor had ordered me to take a course of electric-light baths.

H. H. suggested that we should console each

other by going on what he called a "funny-moon," which we did, and which more than deserved its name. I forget the different places we went to, but just before we left Interlaken he wrote to Robert Hichens and informed him that "The Transit of Venus" was just about to take place, which being interpreted meant that the "funny-moon" was almost at an end and that I was *en route* for Bern. We were going via the Lake of Thun, and just as we were about to embark, a scene took place of so comical a nature that even the porter whom we had engaged to carry our luggage stood stock-still, doubled up, and laughed till he was exhausted.

I must explain that at that period of my existence I generally travelled about with a much beloved "hold-all" to which H. H. always referred as "The Haggis," and which was always crammed full—not only of the things it was originally intended to carry (an india-rubber bath, rugs, etc.), but of everything that had been forgotten at the last moment: hair-wash, nail-brush, bedroom-slippers, garments that you could have sworn had been sent to the wash and returned to your trunk, but that gazed up at you with a "Verlassen, Verlassen" expression when, as a last precaution, you flew to the linen basket and tore off its cover to make *quite* sure; to say nothing of all the things that seem to grow all over the darkest corners of the room during the last five minutes of a stay in any hotel, and that are only retrieved by accident. The fact is that to travel *really* comfortably one ought always to be accompanied by a blood-hound. This, however, is only by the way.

The syren was hooting, the boat was already crowded with passengers, and others were still pouring in, when H. H. and I rushed on to the landing-stage, late as usual, with the porter at our heels, his back laden with bags, suitcases, portmanteaux, and his whole body staggering beneath the weight of the Haggis. I was attired that day in a garment some-

what similar to one which for some cryptic reason best known to its designer, was advertised as a *Gentleman-Louvre* when it was on sale at that celebrated emporium in Paris. It was a sort of cape with two slits for the arms. The reason I mention these details is that this second edition of the original Gentleman-Louvre played a leading rôle in the comedy.

Just as H. H., the porter, and I arrived opposite the gangway, the Haggis burst open with a loud and vulgar sigh of relief. An old boot fell dejectedly to the ground, and H. H. and the porter began to laugh; so did the people standing nearest to us; but I was so horrified at the idea of further self-revelations on the part of the Haggis, which had always controlled itself up to the present moment, even under the most trying circumstances, that I made a dash for the boot which I slipped through one of the slits of my cape, clinging to it with one hand, after which we tried to strap up the wretched thing. But just as we were engaged in this almost impossible task, the fellow-boot, in a similar state of decomposition, escaped from its prison house and collapsed at our feet. H. H., who by this time was braying with laughter, seized hold of it, and crying triumphantly, "*Even in death they were not divided,*" he shoved it with such violence into the other slit of my Gentleman-Louvre (which he mistook for a pocket) that boot No. 2 pushed boot No. 1. out of its hiding-place; *both* of them fell simultaneously to the ground, and lay prostrate at my feet, but not, I am quite sure, in the gay "first position." Meanwhile the crowd leaning over the rails of the boat were all laughing and so were the people on the landing-stage. As to H. H. and the porter I thought they would never leave off. I laughed and felt desperate at intervals, for how that disreputable Haggis was ever going to accomplish the rest of the journey I couldn't imagine. Owing to its ignominious breakdown we were very nearly left

behind, but when we finally took our seats among the laughing crowd, my passion for "hold-alls" was distinctly on the wane.

At Bern I immediately began my cure, visiting every day an *établissement* where I sat from twenty minutes to half an hour inside a circular tub provided with innumerable electric lights. On these occasions I may say, without undue vanity, that I was the centre of attraction although surrounded by shining lights far more brilliant than myself. I was weighed after each bath, and the nice Swiss girl in attendance assured me that I was shrinking to a mere shadow of my former self. In fact, if I was to believe her, and the weighing machine, both of whom I am afraid were as unreliable as the Haggis, I should soon be qualified to pose as an advertisement for the *établissement* in a double photograph entitled: "Before and After." My own opinion was that if any reduction *had* taken place it was not visible to the naked eye, which is, after all, the only one that matters.

While I sat roasting majestically among the electric lights, she did crochet work. She told me that she was engaged to be married, and that the first thing her mother said to her after the betrothal was: "Jetzt, Lotte, an's Werk! und fleissig gehäckelt."¹ This, no doubt, accounted for the yards and yards of crochet lace at which she toiled almost feverishly from morning till night. Every garment in the trousseau was evidently to be trimmed with crochet, and for aught I know, the wedding-dress itself. I feel convinced that if mother and daughter had followed the secret and passionate promptings of their own hearts, they would certainly have sat up to the small hours of every night in order to crochet the wedding-veil—and the wreath of orange blossoms into the bargain!

My sister arrived in Bern before my cure was over,

¹ "Now, Lotte, get to work, and crochet for all you are worth!"

and we spent some very happy days together. There was an old-world atmosphere about the quaint old town—something friendly, that reminded us both of the Germany of our girlhood. The surrounding country was exquisite. The memory of one day in particular is specially dear to me, for we spent it together in one of those lovely emerald green meadows that Nature flings so often high up between the mountains of Switzerland, and there, seated on the grass, in full view of the splendid Bernese Oberland, we both realized that if we had been separated in the flesh for years, our hearts had known no such separation, and that people living in the same house can be farther apart than others between whom an ocean rolls.

After a few excursions to Grindelwald, Lucerne, etc., we went to Como, where we stayed at the Villa Ricordi. The owner (the famous music publisher of Milan) was absent, and the caretaker had been allowed to let a few rooms in the villa, to which a large, rambling garden was attached which sloped down to the lake. We had both villa and garden to ourselves, but most of our time was spent on the lake, where I took my sister to see my old haunts: the garden of the Villa d'Este, Torno, the romantically beautiful Villa Pliniana, and last but not least, the Villa Pedraglio, where I had spent so many happy months the year before. From Como she went to Nice to see relatives, and I went to Florence, where we agreed to meet again in a few days.

It was there that I made the acquaintance of a well-known teacher of singing, a pupil of the great Lamperti of Milan, whose traditions he faithfully carried on. He always took his meals at the hotel where I was staying. One of the rules of this establishment was that no one was allowed to monopolize a table; one was obliged to share it with another guest, an arrangement I didn't relish at all, as, like Lord Dundreary, I like to "flock" by myself when on my travels. Fortunately

for me I was given a seat at Mr. Claude Trevor's table, and we soon made friends. One evening the conversation turned on music; neither of us knew anything about each other; he didn't know my name, nor did I know his, but after a little while he began to tell me about some of his experiences with music publishers. They were distinctly amusing. His account of their united grim determination not to publish any of his compositions was so humorous that I only wish they could have heard it, though it is just possible they might not have appreciated it as much as I did. At last I ventured to suggest that surely *some* of these gentlemen bore a fleeting resemblance to most other human beings, and that they didn't all come into the world equipped with horns and cloven feet. But to this he said, shaking his head: "If *you* knew what *I* know about music publishers, you would tell a very different tale."

By this time I thought it might be as well to give him a hint that I *did* know something about them, and I remember the conversation winding up by my begging him to let me have the manuscript of a polka he had written, with a title-page of his own invention which, in itself alone, was enough to bring in a fortune to any enterprising publisher if properly advertised. A large clod-hopping boot, studded with nails, and caked in mud, was to occupy the centre of the page, while the title itself—written by the tag-end of the boot-lace—was to consist of these two words: "*Fairy Footsteps.*"

A few months later I took the manuscript with me to London. The title-page as yet only existed in the imagination of its humorous author, but I described what it was to be like in colours even more glowing than those which would ultimately adorn the gigantic boot on which so much depended. But the publisher to whom I showed it would have nothing to do with it. He turned a deaf ear to all my arguments. Such is life!

CHAPTER SEVEN

My sister and I spent some weeks at Siena before she returned to Chile, and while we were there, I wrote two songs, "Isaotta Blanzesmano," and "A Song of the Sahara."

The first song I had begun in Sicily, but I was not satisfied with it. There was so much I wanted to express in it. Goethe writes in one of his poems :

" ' Warum bin ich vergänglich, O Zeus? ' So fragte die Schönheit.

' Macht ich doch,' sagte der Gott, ' nur das Vergängliche schon.'

Und die Liebe, die Blumen, der Tau und die Jugend vernahmen's

Alle gingen sie weg weinend von Jupiter's Thron."¹

But I wanted to try and convey in my song that love—the love that is strong as death—is not perishable like beauty and flowers and dew and youth. I wanted to try and convey, especially in the last phrase of that song, that to those who believe in the immortality of the soul, the immortality of the love that dwells within it is no idle dream. Love may leave the throne of Jupiter in tears, but not the throne of God.

When I returned to London I asked Mrs. George Swinton if she would sing it for me to Signor Tito Ricordi, who wished to hear it. I loved the timbre of her voice, and I loved her singing. There was something primitive about it that suggested the eternal things that dwell in the deeps of the heart and that are

¹ " Why am I perishable, O Zeus? " Thus spake Beauty. " The perishable alone," said the god, " have I made fair." And Love and the flowers, the dew and Youth, on hearing these words,

Departed in tears from Jupiter's throne.

brought to the surface, and revealed, from time to time, by some gifted artist of unusual temperament to those who have ears to hear. Mrs. Swinton was born in Russia, and she understood a good many things *à demi mot*. We had studied the song together—it suited her to perfection—she stood for “Eternal Woman” as she sang it. And one morning we arranged to meet Signor Ricordi at 265 Regent Street, the London branch of his famous publishing house in Milan. It made a strange impression upon him; I can still see the expression in his face as he said: “C’est comme un rêve d’opium.”

I asked him if he thought there would be any difficulty in getting d’Annunzio’s permission to set the words to music, but he said: “Non—je vous obtiendrai la permission moi-même.” Mr. Fuller-Maitland wrote the criticism that appeared in *The Times* after Mrs. Swinton sang it for the first time in public at the Bechstein Hall, on December 4th, 1905; it made me very happy, and touched me very much. I still possess it.

It was while we were in Siena that *The Garden of Allah* came out. With the exception of the last few pages I had read the book in Sicily as each chapter was typewritten, and after reading the really splendid review which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* immediately after its publication, I re-read it in the copy that was sent to me from London. It was then that I set the little love-song in Chapter XVII, trying to get the same “far-away” atmosphere into the music that runs through the poem, which is supposed to be sung by an Arab boy travelling on his camel through the desert.

That song was also published by Ricordi, and was beautifully sung by Mr. Paul Reimers at a concert I gave at the Bechstein Hall during one of my annual visits to London.

And now the time was fast approaching when my sister would be obliged to return to South America.

But before leaving Siena she asked me if I thought it would be possible to obtain the Pope's blessing, and a photograph of himself with his signature, for a children's hospital which she had set her heart on founding in Valparaiso, where the total inability of most of the poor to deal with cases of serious illness resulted as often as not in the death of their unfortunate little children. Before leaving Chile she had talked the matter over with another woman—a great friend—and had planned the whole thing; they had also been in consultation with many other men and women of all nationalities and all religious denominations, as to the best way of carrying out these plans. My sister herself belonged to the Church of England. Her friend held perfectly independent views on religion, but Chile being a Catholic country, Catholics were naturally in the majority. The doctors who were giving their services insisted that none but trained nurses should be on the staff, irrespective of any religion they might belong to, whereas the Chilean ladies were particularly anxious that nuns alone should be in charge and that a chaplain should be permanently attached to the hospital. When it was pointed out to them that the nuns, though good and devoted women, were in nowise competent to undertake work in a hospital that was to be run on modern lines, and that as the patients would for the most part consist of babies and very young children, it was hardly necessary to incur the extra expense of a chaplain, they at once raised objections. They didn't realize that there was no sort of anti-religious feeling on the part of the non-Catholics, but merely a strong desire to do what was best for the future patients, and what was wisest in the outlay of the money—a considerable sum—that would have to be collected before the hospital materialized. It was thought that if my sister—to whose initiative the hospital would ultimately owe its existence—were to obtain the Pope's blessing for its welfare, written upon his own photograph and signed

by himself, it would surely be a proof of their *bona fides* in the matter.

When my sister consulted me I told her I didn't think there would be the slightest difficulty in obtaining what she wanted from the kind and gentle old Pope (Pius X), who was beloved by everyone who knew him. I wrote to him myself. Someone, I forget who, gave me an introduction to a famous Italian Cardinal, and advised me to ask him to hand my letter to His Holiness. I went to Rome and had a short interview with the Cardinal, who was so horrified by the brevity of my note, which went straight to the point and contained none of the long and flowery sentences supposed to be essential in an Italian letter when addressed to anyone of importance—to say nothing of the Head of the Church—that he refused point blank to present such an unconventional epistle to His Holiness. He said he would write a suitable letter himself. Perhaps, in his heart of hearts, he suspected me of being the author of the peremptory telegram hurled at Leo XIII (according to legend) during the Boer War :

“ Pope—Vatican—Stop the war.—RICHARDS.”

To make a long story short, he either forgot all about it, or, on second thoughts, decided to have nothing more to do with the matter. In any case he made as short work of me as I had made of my letter, for I never heard from him again! I waited for a few days, and then I wrote to Mary de Navarro, who I knew would do her best for us. And so she did. But she took good care to write to an English Monsignore who had no more use for flowery letters than I had, and whose letter to the Pope wasn't a bit more ceremonious than my own—rather less so if anything. I saw it before it was dispatched. After a few days the photograph arrived with the blessing, and the signature attached to it.

After her return to Chile my sister went to Santiago

and obtained a grant of land from the President of the Republic, who also contributed several thousand dollars when he saw the way she had put her shoulder to the wheel. For a committee had been formed of which she had been made president; money was being collected on all sides; most of the great business houses with which Valparaiso abounds were contributing to the funds; entertainments were being given, and collections were being made from house to house. And then came the terrific earthquake of 1906 which destroyed a great part of the town, and which naturally, for the time being, put an end to all their hopes. But her labour of love was to be crowned with success in spite of everything, and to-day, in the entrance hall of the Valparaiso Children's Hospital, two photographs hang opposite each other—that of Pope Pius X and that of my dear sister.

And though it most certainly was not “whispered in Heaven,” it was actually “muttered in” . . . certain circles eight thousand miles away, that the signature and the blessing were both forgeries!

This reminds me of a sermon preached one Sunday in a West of Ireland village church by an indignant parish priest, who had been compelled to walk half-way to his presbytery in the pelting rain on the previous Sunday—not one of his flock having offered him the protection of one of their own umbrellas. “And if I haven’t caught cold and coughed meself into Kingdom Come, it isn’t any fault of yours,” he roared from the pulpit, “and if it hadn’t been for a kind-hearted Protestant gentleman who saw me home under his own umbrella, it’s in the grave I’d be at this very minute, shivering and shaking under the sod. And when the blackguard lot of you are frizzling in a place I’m too polite to mention, that kind-hearted Protestant gentleman and meself will be sitting side by side in Paradise, enjoying ourselves, and mighty glad to have nothing more to do with any one of you.”

My sister was to sail from Lisbon in the beginning of December, and I arranged to accompany her to Madrid, after which I intended to remain on in Spain for a few weeks. Our last day together was spent in the Prado, the superb picture gallery of Madrid. After I had seen her off I returned to the hotel, where I was laid up for a day or two. The icy winds that are the curse of Madrid had brought on another attack of bronchitis, to which I succumbed the very day of my sister's departure. After my horrible experience in Paris I felt quite unequal to risking a similar one in Madrid, where I didn't know a living soul, and remembering what the climate of Taormina had done for me, I resolved at any cost to make for the south; ill as I was, I went and bought a ticket for Sevilla. I started in the evening and travelled all night, but even before arriving the next morning it was so much warmer that I felt better and was able to breathe with far greater ease. I stayed for about six weeks in Sevilla, and enjoyed every moment of my visit. I revelled in the architecture of the town; in the Cathedral, in the Giralda, in the lovely Alcàzar, and in the Casa de Pilato. And I loved exploring the narrow streets, where I often met women with the traditional flower tucked into their hair, and sometimes came across *toreros* (bull-fighters) in their wonderfully picturesque costume. In one of those narrow streets I bought three volumes by Adolf Schack, dealing with the poetry and art of the Arabs in Spain. They were very interesting, and admirably translated from the original German into Spanish by Don Juan Valera, and it was while reading these books that I realized how much of its wonderful attraction Southern Spain owes to the Moors.

On Christmas Eve (1904) the daughter of the proprietor of the hotel came to my room and asked me if I would care to see some real, genuine Spanish dancing. It appeared that the servants were having a party in a large room upstairs, and dancing national

dances. I naturally accepted her invitation, and was the only stranger among them that evening. The entertainment had not been got up for the benefit of foreign visitors, and was all the more interesting on that account.

Spanish music is extraordinarily fascinating; it almost casts a spell over some people, so strongly does it appeal to their imagination, and Spanish dancing, I believe, affects others in much the same way. I admire the gay, devil-may-care dancing of the men, but to my mind there is something too bold, too aggressive, something altogether too deliberately provocative in the movements and postures of the women, in whose faces there is at times an expression of insolent triumph and contempt that is positively hateful. Yet the country that produces this sort of woman produces another and very different type. I know it well, for once when I was ill, it was a Spanish nun who took care of me, and a more lovable human being I never came across.

Spanish music can be strangely ominous and tragic as well as gay and exciting. In the second volume of Granados' *Danzas Españolas*, the dance in E minor, dedicated to Alfredo G. Faria, is an example of what I mean. There is something sinister in it, something that suggests coming disaster from the very beginning, from the very first notes of the first motive. Whenever I play it, Carmen stands before me in all her insolent beauty, all the insolent consciousness of her physical attractions. And then she vanishes. At the first notes of the lovely little second motive—so simple, so serene—a Spanish nun takes her place—peace in her face, and peace in her heart. You can almost hear Carmen push her aside as she confronts you once again. Carmen in the grip of Fate—defiant to the last!

How strange that two little melodies, and harmonies that in themselves are not at all out of the way—not at all *gesucht*—should have been able to

convey a sense of inexorable fatality—to me, at all events.

Before leaving Sevilla I wandered about the town trying to obtain glimpses of the fountains inside the *patios* full of orange and lemon trees, belonging to the beautiful homes of the upper classes which are built on the model of Arab houses, and which reminded me of my trustee's house in Valparaiso, built on similar lines, though in a far simpler style. Sevilla must have been a dream of beauty during the Arab occupation. One of the caliphs had a wonderful palace in the centre of the town where the Alcàzar now stands, as well as innumerable other palaces and gardens on the banks of the Guadalquivir; but alas, they have all disappeared.

Towards the end of January I went to Cordova to see the famous mosque begun by the Caliph Abdurrahman. It is a thing of such perfect beauty that it is difficult to conceive why it was not left alone. But the Christians tried to convert it into a cathedral. They erected a dome and cleared an open space for a choir. The heavy Gothic architecture inside the low-roofed mosque with its forest of slender pillars strikes a false note that makes one wince. There is something horribly sad and dreary about Cordova which it is difficult to connect with the once magnificent capital of Arabian Spain. The ancient city has completely disappeared, though the Moorish walls still exist. Beyond a few insignificant ruins the splendid mosque is the only reminder of the glorious past. I felt so depressed that I was thankful to get away. I felt as if I were escaping from a haunted house, whose beauty had been allowed to go to rack and ruin, whose walls were crumbling, whose rooms were symbols of desolation and decay, whose broken windows were covered with cobwebs, and in which it was impossible to imagine that any human being could ever have known a moment's happiness.

To find oneself in the Alhambra of Granada after

the gloom of Cordova is like waking in a dream palace among the clouds, after a prolonged nightmare. No wonder King Boabdil wept as he looked up at its white towers for the last time. No wonder the Arab chroniclers sang the praises of this Moorish palace in terms which you think absurdly exaggerated till you have seen it with your own eyes and lost your heart to it; after which you are perfectly willing to accept their statement that here—in Granada—the “flowers of the earth vie with the stars of Heaven.” The Moors knew happiness in the land of their adoption . . . and isn’t it happiness that transforms the loveliest scenes on earth, the most glorious pageant of sunrise and sunset, into something even more beautiful than they really are? Isn’t it happiness we associate with the smell of the flowers we love beyond all others? Isn’t it happiness we associate with the soft summer winds that breathe upon us now as once they breathed long, long ago?

The present vanishes as you wander through the glorious halls and courts surrounded by the snowy range of the Sierra Nevada, or gaze up at the balcony that communicated with the women’s apartments, from which the odalisques of the harem looked through the (still existing) fretwork of wood on to the gay and festive scenes in the wonderful hall below. As you rest for a while beside the alabaster fountain among the roses and myrtle, among the orange and lemon trees of Lindaraja’s lovely little garden, lying among these fantastically beautiful halls like a tiny gem in a jewelled casket, the garment of your own individuality slips from off you. You are an Oriental living once again in the terrestrial Paradise you loved so well—you are inhaling the perfume of roses and orange-blossom that faded centuries ago—the radiant past has folded you in her arms—you lie dreaming on her breast.

In his fascinating book, *The Alhambra*, Washington Irving has caught the spirit of this beautiful place

to such perfection that it would indeed be absurd for me to try to describe it. Every page throws open a door through which you pass into the enchanting regions of Romance, in which you seem to catch a glimpse of the Moorish cavalier, and the Christian girl he loved :

“ Dueña de la negra toca
 Por un beso de tu boca
 Diera un reino Boabdil.
 Y yo por ello, Cristiana
 Te diera de buena gana
 Mil cielos si fueron mil.”

—ZORILLA.

I have just come across the volume of Zorilla's poems in which I first saw those lines, which belong to the last verse of a poem called “ Oriental.” It was in a lonely rambling bungalow, buried among poplar trees and in full view of the Andes, that I set them to music and sang them to the accompaniment of the guitar that was the only musical instrument in the house. On the fly-leaf of the book is written, “ 11th December, 1881, Valparaiso,” and it was that poem, so full of Oriental imagery, that awoke in me an abiding love for Arabian Spain, and the lands of the Rising Sun.

Before leaving Granada, I went, like everyone else, to visit the gipsies who live in the caves below the Alhambra. One of the gipsies—a good-looking, picturesque woman, no longer by any means in her first youth—told me that as a young girl she had been taken to Paris for the purpose of teaching the original Carmen of Bizet's immortal opera—Madame Galli-Marié—how to dance according to Spanish gipsy traditions.

My old friend, Raymond von Zurmühlen, says : “ There are no good teachers. There are only good pupils.” All the same, the more gifted the pupil, the more readily will he acknowledge the immense

debt he owes the teacher who—like Zurmühlen himself—is able to rouse his imagination, to set it on fire as it were, and who during each lesson takes advantage of every moment to fan the flames. In his book, *Musiciens Français d'aujourd'hui*, Monsieur Octave Sère speaks of Madame Galli-Marié as “ l'inoubliable interprète du rôle de Carmen,” but he says nothing about that Spanish gipsy. Yet so ignorant a woman could scarcely have invented the story.

It seems almost unimaginable that *Carmen* should have proved so complete a fiasco on its first production in Paris in 1875. Poor Bizet, whose health was very delicate, died only three weeks later—heartbroken. And to think that only a few years later it obtained success all over the world; that even now, more than fifty years after it was composed, it can still draw crowds to any opera house, and for sheer beauty, for sheer genius in the interpretation of Prosper Mérimée's story, can hold its own with any opera ever written! As one of his later critics wrote in an article on *Carmen* that showed how well he understood both the man and his work: “ Bizet l'a écrite avec son sang et ses larmes et il s'est arraché le cœur pour le laisser après lui, vibrant, palpitant et chantant dans ces pages de magnifique réalisme.”

An Englishman and his very pretty wife had been staying for a few days at the same hotel as myself; we all left Granada on the same day and by the same train, and we all got into the same carriage. Their name was Fitzgerald. During the course of conversation I learned that they were the joint authors of a book on Naples; Mrs. Fitzgerald was responsible for the text, and her husband for its water-colour sketches: he had studied painting at Bushey, at the Herkomer school, and this attractive book which I saw afterwards in London was printed, I believe, by Adam & Charles Black. We were all bound for North Africa, on our way to Almeria, where we had

been told we should find a steamer that would take us to Algiers; needless to say this information was absolutely incorrect; most information is—in Spain! We certainly found a ship there—a sort of cattle ship, but it was only going to Cartagena, and to complicate matters, we found that we should have to wait a night and a day in order to start for a place to which none of us wanted to go! But as it was the only way of getting out of a place where none of us wanted to stay, we made up our minds to embark, and to endure a thirteen hours' uncomfortable sea-journey for which, had our route been properly made out, there would not have been the slightest necessity.

Next morning when we arrived in Cartagena, we heard that a Spanish steamer was leaving that night for Algeria—for Oran, which isn't far from Algiers. I was really anxious to get there, for I was expecting a letter of credit which I knew was due in a week at latest. What with the delay at Almeria, the extra sea-journey, and the hotel bill at Cartagena, my ready money was nearly exhausted, and I was terrified at the idea of being stranded penniless in Spain where I knew no one to whom I could apply in case of need. That morning a hurricane swept over Cartagena; the sea became so rough and looked so threatening that the Fitzgeralds abandoned all idea of travelling by the Spanish boat, and decided to wait for one of the steamers belonging to the "Messageries Maritimes" which was calling at Cartagena in two or three days on its way to Algiers, when the wind would in all probability have dropped. They both came to see me and begged me to delay my departure, but I told them quite frankly how I was situated and that I couldn't afford to stay on. They then most kindly offered to advance me some money, but I felt I really couldn't accept such a favour as I wasn't absolutely "stony-broke," and, thanking them with all my heart, I told them that I thought I'd better stick to my original plan of leaving that night.

I was alone in the room I had hired for the day when the wind became still more violent, and just as I was wondering whether, after all, it would not be better to accept the offer of my kind new friends, I heard a voice calling to someone just outside my door: "Navarro!" I said to myself: "If that man's Christian name is 'Antonio,' I'll ask his advice, and I'll follow it."

I went into the passage; the man, evidently one of the outdoor servants attached to the hotel, was still there. I liked his face, and asked him if he would tell me his Christian name; it was "Antonio," the name of one of my best and kindest friends. I had a feeling—very absurd no doubt—that no one called "Antonio Navarro" would advise me to do anything that might do me harm.

"Do you think it would be dangerous to cross over to Algeria in this storm . . . would you risk it yourself?" I asked.

The man didn't answer for a moment. Then he said: "If it were absolutely necessary for me to go, I *would* go."

After that I returned to my room, finished packing, and later on drove down to the harbour where I embarked on a veritable cockleshell of a steamer. There were only two other passengers on board, a man and his wife, who almost immediately disappeared into their cabin. My own berth was situated in a tiny open space next the dreary little saloon, and was only lit by the faint light that had been left there. Next to my berth a bottle stood on a shelf; half a candle had been stuck into it; my heart misgave me, as I thought of the dark in which I might perhaps be left—to light the candle would be far too dangerous, even for a few seconds. Things weren't so bad for the first few hours, but towards midnight the sea became so rough that I thought the tiny ship would never be able to live in it; I expected it to capsize every moment. I was nearly flung out of my

cabin during the whole course of that hideous night, and only by clinging desperately to the sides of my berth did I save myself from falling out again and again. When at last we reached Oran, it seemed too good to be true, and I can still remember the joy with which I tumbled into one of those comfortable beds for which French hotels are so justly celebrated all over the world.

Next day I went to Algiers, where I spent a month at a delightful hotel in Mustapha Supérieur. On arriving I asked for a small, cheap room at the top of the house, and was shown to it. When the proprietor's wife, who was an Englishwoman, asked me if I didn't think I'd be far more comfortable in a larger room, I told her exactly what had happened, and that for the next four or five days I had very little money at my disposal. She asked me to write my name in the visitors' book, which I did, and then, after looking at it, she said: "Are you, by any chance, related to the composer of this name?" I said I was—very much so! Whereupon she very kindly told me that I might at once occupy the larger and much pleasanter room. Afterwards I said to her husband: "How could either of you know that I was telling you the truth?" "Oh," he said, laughing, "in the first place you had come from Spain where nothing ever *does* go right, and secondly, you asked for a cheap room—impostors always ask for a suite of apartments!"

I had done so much travelling and sightseeing during the last few weeks that I was rather glad to settle down and rest. Naturally I went to see the Arab town, and in the course of my walks often saw many lovely Arab houses and beautiful gardens, but I only made one excursion, and that was to Staouëli, to visit the Trappist monastery from which the monks had recently been expelled—the one Robert Hichens had in mind when he wrote *The Garden of Allah*.

He had once stayed there himself, but, with an author's licence, had placed it outside Tunis in his book, instead of outside Algiers. I never saw anything that impressed me so sadly. It was like gazing upon a body that had been cruelly stabbed, in which life still lingered. The long table in the refectory was just as the monks had left it: plates and glasses, knives and forks, all of the simplest kind, were still lying there, as if they had only just risen from a meal.

In the empty chapel, which somehow didn't look deserted, and in which so many prayers had been offered up to the glory of God, I saw several of those little leaflets which Catholics often place between the leaves of their prayer-books, with pictures of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, or the Saints on one side, and a short prayer, or verses from the Scriptures on the other. I picked up several and kept them. Suddenly I became aware that reality and fiction were jostling each other in my brain. I was almost startled when, wandering past the fourteen Stations of the Cross, I found myself in the churchyard of the monastery standing beside a grave in which a monk called "Père André" was buried. As I read his name upon the tombstone I thought involuntarily of Boris Androvsky, the hero of Robert Hichens' novel. I felt as if I were standing beside his grave. And I thought of the woman to whom the soul of her beloved was dearer than his body. Many people think that is impossible.

But it isn't.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THERE is something in strong contrasts that has always had an irresistible attraction for me. My own life has been full of them. It has never run on the same lines for any length of time, and that fact is due, no doubt, to my own temperament. Destiny and temperament go hand in hand.

As for contrasts, I have lived in luxury times out of number at one moment and in absurdly straitened circumstances the next. But on one occasion things reached a climax. It was in Taormina, when I found that unless I ate my macaroni without Parmesan cheese for at least ten days, my grocer's bill would exceed my ability to deal with it. When I told Giovannino, who was not only my faithful servant but my devoted friend, that he was to countermand an order for "Parmeggiano" that had been given on the previous day, he protested; he nearly wept. He said *l'onore della casa*¹ was at stake; it couldn't be done; the grocer would cease to respect not only his *padrona* but himself. He implored me to reconsider my decision. Everything, of course, depends upon the pont-y-few (I quote this original spelling of "point of view" from the letter of a German maid). I stuck to mine, and Giovannino stuck to his, and next day the usual bowl of grated cheese appeared upon the table. After luncheon we had a heart-to-heart talk, in which I more or less expressed my opinion that if the honour of the house was really founded on nothing more substantial than Parmesan cheese, its foundations were even less secure than those of the house in the parable that were

¹ The honour of the house.

built upon sand. His face was a study as I preached my little sermon. I won the day—to a certain extent. But as anything was better than that I—"La Whitey"—should lose my social status in the High Street of Taormina, I feel pretty certain that he simplified matters by informing the grocer that the doctor had forbidden me to touch Parmesan cheese for at least ten days.

Another time, more than forty years ago, while I was spending a few days in Rome at the Convent attached to the Church of the Santissima Trinita de Monti, I received a letter asking me to accompany Raymond von Zurmühlen in some of my songs, at an evening party that was to be given by Baroness Rothschild at her house in Piccadilly. I think it was that same Baroness Willy de Rothschild who wrote "*Si vous n'avez rien à me dire*"—a little song that was extremely popular in Paris for some years. As I was asked to play professionally at this party, and was on the eve of returning to England, I accepted the engagement. Thirty-six hours from the time I started from Rome I was in London. I only just had time to dress, but I managed to get to Piccadilly by ten o'clock, and still remember the strong impression made upon me by the long, brilliantly lighted room, and the many men and beautifully dressed women with which it was crowded. I remembered the simple little convent room from which I had just come, the white and blue robed nuns by whom I had been surrounded only a few hours ago, and was almost startled by the contrast.

But I enjoyed that evening immensely. I think most of my contemporaries will agree with me that, added to the brilliance of the parties that were constantly given in those days at all the great houses in London where private concerts with professional artists and celebrated opera singers were the fashion, there was something delightfully friendly and informal which contributed greatly to their success.

There certainly was nothing formal in the way Zurmühlen greeted me that evening; nothing "prim" in the way he rushed at me, seized my hand and said in his funny English: "Maudie White! How suppalendid that you've arrived in time! Now all will go well! Now there will be *stimmung*." And by this he meant that the mere presence of another musician who understood what he was aiming at, who wouldn't miss a single "nuance," and who really adored the way he interpreted everything he sang, was enough to create that atmosphere in which every artist breathes more freely—the atmosphere of sympathy, the atmosphere of success. Zurmühlen was the most inspired *lieder* singer I have ever heard in my life; it is impossible to exaggerate the way he interpreted not only the music of a song, not only its words, but the very soul of its composer. He had genius. And oh, the difference between genius and talent! Apart from his singing, he was very popular in society, and a great favourite with everyone in spite of his eccentricities—perhaps because of them. Indeed they endeared him to many of us. They certainly did to me. Once, at a dinner-party at which he happened to be seated on one side of the table and I on the other, and during one of those awful pauses that for some unaccountable reason occur even in the midst of the most animated gathering, and for which each person present feels that he, and he alone, is responsible, Zurmühlen, sitting between two women he didn't know, suddenly heaved a portentous sigh, and said in a dejected voice, as though he were speaking to himself: "I wish to God that I were sitting next Maude White!" Everyone began to laugh. So did I, although I felt rather embarrassed at this publicly expressed desire for my company!

But on the night of that concert at Baroness Rothschild's house, not even Zurmühlen's beautiful singing had been able to banish from my memory a strange and interesting story that had been told to

me just before I left Rome, by one of the nuns, a sweet old English lady, who bore so strong a resemblance to my mother that I felt as if I had known her all my life.

One day a Carmelite father called at her convent, in connection with some charitable work; she went down to speak to him, and just as he was about to leave he said:

“ Vous ne me reconnaissez pas, ma Sœur? ”

Very astonished, she said she couldn't remember ever having met him before.

“ Est-ce-que je suis changé à ce point? ” he said, smiling.

Still she didn't recognize him.

“ Eh bien, ma Sœur, moi je vous retrouve toute entière. Vous n'avez pas changé du tout. Comment donc,” he continued, “ vous ne vous rappelez plus de votre ancien ami? Pourtant, quand vous etiez jeune fille, et moi jeune homme, nous nous sommes rencontrés bien des fois dans le monde, et la dernière fois que je vous ai vue, nous avons même dansé ensemble! ”

And then, in a flash, she remembered the attractive young Jew she had so often met in Paris where she had spent several years of her girlhood; the young Jew who, abandoning a brilliant musical career, had retired from the world two years after embracing the Catholic faith. This young man, whose name was Hermann Cohen, was an exceptionally talented pianist and extremely gifted in every respect; he was a beloved pupil of Franz Liszt, who himself organized his first concert in Paris when he was only fourteen years old, and thought so highly of him that shortly afterwards, when he was living in Geneva, he actually recommended young Cohen as one of the professors for the new conservatoire that had just been founded in the town. As he was only fifteen years old, difficulties were made on account of his youth, but all objections gave way before the express wishes of

Liszt and the really astonishing talent of the boy, who retained the post as long as Liszt remained in Geneva. When he returned to Paris after an absence of fifteen months, young Cohen accompanied him. Shortly afterwards he made the acquaintance of the celebrated Princess Belgiojoso, who not only delighted in his talent but in the lad himself. She introduced him to everyone worth knowing in Paris, and very soon he became as great a favourite in society as he was with the public. His chief friends at this time were Liszt himself, Georges Sand, Horace Vernet, Louis Veuillot, and Mario. His conversion at the age of twenty-five was a nine days' wonder, but he was so much in earnest that when he was twenty-seven he entered the Carmelite Order and was eventually the founder of the Carmelite church and monastery in Church Street, Kensington.

One of the most touching and impressive episodes in his religious career was connected with some Catholic sailors, one of whom was a Spaniard, the others natives of the Philippine Islands, who were in prison at Newgate for piracy and murder. I heard the following story from the old nun in Rome, but having just come across a letter of Father Hermann's in which he tells the same story with many more details, I have preferred to let him speak for himself. The letter is too long to reproduce in its entirety, but the following extracts may, I hope, be of interest.

One day the Governor of Newgate sent for Father Hermann. This is what he writes to a friend, and throughout the whole letter there runs a strong feeling of sympathy for, and appreciation of the English authorities.

"I doubt if there exists in these days any Catholic country in which the officers of a prison would receive a priest with the considerate courtesy which I received from them in London. Owing to the kind thoughtfulness on the part of the Protestant Governor of

Newgate, we were able to spend some hours daily with the prisoners. Fortunately our Novice Master was a Spaniard, for they understood no European language except Spanish, and during nearly a month, he was able zealously to devote himself to these unhappy men condemned to be hanged at the Old Bailey. To the glory of our divine religion let us declare it: during the fortnight which intervened between the sentence and the execution, the Faith changed these wolves to lambs . . . submitting without a murmur to offer up to God the sacrifice of their lives. . . . On the day of the execution,¹ while it was yet dark, three priests provided with a safe-conduct made their way through the vast crowds which all night long had stationed themselves in the street near the prison. . . . Imagine what were the feelings of a priest when through this multitude he bore, concealed within his habit, the God of the Eucharist, Jesus Christ, who willed to take possession of those condemned before they were handed over to the executioner. Probably the jailers knew not what was the mysterious Treasure which entered with us into the prison (for in England the Sacred Viaticum is not carried openly), but, if they did not kneel as we passed, I can testify that they nevertheless received us with every mark of religious respect, and for two hours left us, as it were, masters of the terrible enclosure.

“ We found the condemned kneeling before their crucifix . . . Never during the thirteen years that I have been a priest had I so strikingly experienced the power and the efficiency of the Blessed Eucharist. . . . These young convicts spoke to us only of the peace which filled their hearts, the smallness of their expiation compared with the greatness of their crimes and of their hope of soon seeing the good God—and for ever. . . .

¹ I believe, but am not quite sure, that it was one of the last public executions held in England, if not the last.

“At this moment I was sent for by the High Sheriff who wished to know the state of the prisoners. ‘Were they,’ he asked, ‘very much exasperated, very furious and violent?’ On my answering that I had never seen men more resigned to die, he asked if they desired anything which it would be in his power to grant.

“‘They desire three things,’ I answered; ‘first that they may be permitted to keep about them the signs of their faith (the crucifix, rosary and scapular).’

“‘I consent willingly.’

“‘They also wish for their priest to attend them to the place of execution.’

“It had been notified to me the evening before that our ministry must end before the men mounted the scaffold; great was my satisfaction therefore when the answer was: ‘Let them know that you will be with them.’

“Their third request was likewise granted, namely that they might bid each other adieu.

“Then followed a scene which I shall never forget, and which drew tears not only from these men who were going to die, not only from us who had become their fathers in Christ Jesus, but from the jailers also and the Governor, present at the interview. . . . The bell began to toll. They knelt down and received a last absolution. Francisco, the youngest, scarcely twenty years old, had already mounted the fatal ladder, when he cried: ‘Padre, Padre, no me deje V^d.’¹

“I hurried on before the rest and stood on the plank of the gibbet in view of thirty thousand spectators, several of whom—and amongst them *ladies* of high position—had paid more than forty pounds for a place at the windows.

“The dull murmur of the crowd rose in my ears like the roar of the ocean, and I expected that the sight

¹ “Father, Father, do not leave me.”

of a priest (for the stole and tonsure indicated a *papist*) would raise a storm of imprecations in this quarter of the city where formerly the populace had frequently committed fearful excesses in their hatred against Catholics.

“Two other priests were with me on the scaffold. The condemned stood facing us in a line beneath the gallows. The cross, rosary, and scapular were worn visibly by each, but not a hostile murmur arose! On the contrary, as soon as we appeared the words ‘Hats off’ ran through the crowd, and every head was uncovered. . . .

“From almost under our feet, the plank was gone and the men were hanging; they had not time to suffer. Strangulation instantly deprived them of consciousness. . . . The magistrates then invited us to rest awhile in the Governor’s rooms, and asked in the kindest manner about the state of mind of these poor young men in their last moments, at the same time showing us every mark of courteous esteem, and ordering two of the police officers to escort us home. But this precaution was needless. As we passed through the crowd, we received nothing but marks of respect.

“*The Times* newspaper in its remarks upon this execution observes that when the corpses were inspected in the afternoon it was noticed with surprise that, contrary to the effects produced by this manner of death, the faces of the four men had undergone no alteration, but were calm and composed *as if in a gentle sleep*. The Divine Sacrament, while preserving their souls to eternal life, had also preserved their countenances, the mirror of their souls, from distortion.”

I like to think it was a musician—a musician who only a few years previously had held a brilliant position in the world, and who had a still more brilliant future before him, who, by renouncing the world,

was enabled to be with these poor sailors during their last moments on earth.

From the concert platform and the applause of great crowds to the terrible plank of a gibbet, with the men whose souls he had helped to save! What a contrast!

For many years I went every Sunday to the Carmelite church in Kensington, and often stayed on after Mass to listen to the Gregorian chants sung by the monks, one of whom received me into the Church when I became a Catholic myself at the age of twenty-five. I have often wondered whether it was not the musician who joined their ranks who taught them their chants. There is something essentially mystic in this strictly diatonic music without any fixed rhythmical measure. It has a power of suggesting eternal things that is possessed by none other to the same degree. It is like an almost transparent veil through which we catch a glimpse of the world beyond; there is something in it that confirms our faith in the life beyond the grave. That, at least, is the effect it has always had on me.

I have wandered far away indeed from the thought that was in my mind when I wrote the opening sentence of this chapter, for at that moment I was thinking that there could hardly be a greater contrast in the world than that between the deserted Trappist monastery at Staouëli and the crowded hotels of Monte Carlo, where I went, on leaving Algiers, to visit some relatives wintering there. That particular corner of the Riviera does not appeal very much to me, lovely as it is, and after a few days I returned to London, which I love, and always shall love to the end of my days. Perhaps that is rather a rash statement to make when the dear old town is changing so rapidly, when it is losing so much of its lovable individuality, when so many of its stately old houses are disappearing and buildings, more like factories, are taking their place. Still . . .

On this occasion I only stayed for a few weeks at rooms in Vere Street, and then I went down to Broadway. But this time I didn't stay with the dear Navarros. I took some cosy rooms over the local post office that were kept by one of their old servants—an excellent cook and housekeeper. I sent to Cheltenham for a piano, and then settled down to work. I meant to stay there for at least six months, till it was time to return to the South. My landlady's husband, Mr. Jaques, was the son of a local antiquary, and the wall on one side of the staircase that led to my sitting-room was hung with all sorts of obsolete old weapons—pistols, guns, daggers, etc. Shortly after my arrival in Broadway, I received a letter from Robert Hichens, asking me if I knew of any nice respectable people in the village to whom he could send his Sicilian servant—Carmelo Longo—as he wished him to learn English. I wrote and told him that if he found it possible to associate me with those qualifications I should be delighted to take him under my own wing, as then he could have a room at the post office, where he would be able to share the family life of my landlady and her husband. "I likes men and men likes me," was one of her favourite sayings, and as far as I could make out it was strictly true. So Carmelo would probably be happy in her care. I knew and liked the boy very much, and arranged to meet him in Paris, where I had been asked to stay with an English friend and her Austrian husband at their flat on the left bank of the river.

I shall never forget our arrival in Broadway. From the moment when we stepped on to the platform at Evesham (there was no train to Broadway in those days) we were stared out of countenance. Carmelo was very good-looking, a typical Sicilian youth, with splendid brown eyes, good features and very nice manners, but when some girls who were standing on the platform began to giggle at the way he pronounced

the few English words he addressed to the porter, a dark flush spread over his face, and he asked me, almost fiercely, if it was usual for people to laugh at foreigners in my country. I told him to take no notice of them, that they were ill-bred, ignorant girls who knew no better. I felt sorry for the lad; how was it possible for him not to contrast the treatment he had just received with that which foreigners receive in *his* country, where no one dreams of laughing at their barbarous and often ridiculous pronunciation of Italian, to say nothing of the way they murder the language itself! I remember when I first went to Sicily telling an Italian boy in my service to *look at* a piece of beef for the next twenty-four hours! I made the usual mistake, and confused the word *guardare* (to look) with the French word *garder* (to keep). But he never even smiled, and said quite simply: "Sta bene, Signora," and carried out the order I had meant to give him. Another man I knew ordered some ham, but instead of calling it *prosciutto* he called it "jambone," a word that doesn't exist, and that he had manufactured himself from the French. His servant found out—somehow—what he meant and never called it by any other name while he was in his service. The fact is the *popolo* both in Italy and Sicily is not only innately courteous but often very intelligent.

The day was drawing to a close as Carmelo and I got into the open fly that was to convey us to Broadway. He didn't like the quiet lanes; he thought there was something sinister about them. It was quite dark by the time we drew up at the post office, where I introduced him to Mr. and Mrs. Jaques and then went to my own quarters. Just as I was going to bed Mrs. Jaques burst into my room; she was evidently very much alarmed.

"Oh, Miss White," she said breathlessly, "there'll be an accident. That boy you've brought along with you has taken a gun out of his luggage

and he's loading it. Whatever for? What's he going to do? Do please come and speak to him."

As I didn't suspect poor Carmelo of murderous intentions I wasn't upset by this piece of news, and went and interviewed him. But he also was in a state of agitation, and before I had time to say a word he asked me why we had come to such a dangerous place. I was dumbfounded.

"Dangerous!" I said. "My dear boy, Broadway is one of the quietest and safest places on the face of the earth."

"It can't be!" he said excitedly. "If it weren't dangerous, if they didn't expect to be attacked at any moment, they would never keep all those guns and pistols on the wall, and I mean to be prepared."

Carmelo was quite a good shot, and quite accustomed to fire-arms, but the staircase was lighted so dimly that he hadn't been able to see that the guns and pistols were in such a state of decay that Buffalo Bill himself would not have been able to put a milch cow out of existence with even the largest of them, unless indeed he had attacked the poor thing with the butt end while it was being milked. After I had explained matters to him, and after he had grasped the fact that Mr. Jaques was an *antiquario*, he quieted down, and consented to unload his gun, whereupon Mrs. Jaques once more breathed freely and retired to rest in peace.

After a few days he became devoted to Broadway, and devoted to the friends he made there, with whom he went fruit-picking and haymaking, who called him "Carmeller," and who were loud in their admiration of "that there dare-devil of a feller as give everyone a turn when he come down Broadway Hill at full speed, standing bolt upright on the saddle of his bike, and just as like to kill himself as not!"

Carmelo soon learned to speak English, though at times it was a little difficult to make out what he meant. Once when alluding to some bicycles of a cheap make

(we happened to be speaking Italian) he said : " Sono bicicletti grauli." I was completely mystified till he explained that a *bicicletta graula* stood in the same relation to a really fine bicycle as that in which a four-wheeled cab (a *growler*) stood to a smart brougham.

Carmelo was the original of the Sicilian boy, Gaspare, in R. H.'s novel, *The Call of the Blood*. It is a life-like portrait of the real boy as he was at the age of eighteen, full of the joy of life, warm-hearted, and absolutely fearless.

Before I left England I made up my mind to give a concert at the Bechstein Hall. The only available date before my departure was a Saturday in November, and, if I remember rightly, it was only free in the evening. It was a question of taking the hall on that day or abandoning all idea of the concert. My friends thought it would be almost courting disaster to give a concert on a Saturday night because of the general exodus into the country on Saturday afternoons. But I determined to take the risk. I also fixed the hour for nine o'clock, an innovation which I thought might be successful, as then people would not be obliged to hurry over their dinners. When I called at Chappell's box-office on the Friday morning before the concert, I heard to my dismay that they had only taken in enough money to cover expenses. I was rather worried. My plans for the coming winter depended a good deal upon the result of that concert. On Saturday morning when I called again to ask how things were progressing, to my amazement I found that nearly every ticket had been sold! From a financial point of view it was one of the most successful concerts I ever gave in London. That evening Mrs. George Swinton sang "Isaotta Blanzesmano" for the first time, and it was she who, knowing the pleasure it would give me, sent me the criticism that appeared in *The Times* on the following Monday.

I spent the Christmas of 1905 in Rome, where I

stayed for a few days at the same hotel as Lady Mary von Hügel, who had come to Italy to see her mother, Lady Herbert of Lea. While we were there a frightful tragedy took place just opposite our windows. Early one morning I noticed that a sheet had been thrown over something that was lying on the pavement. To my horror I was told that it was the body of a young American girl who had committed suicide by throwing herself out of the window of one of the upper storeys of the house opposite to the hotel. They were waiting for the arrival of the police to remove the body of the poor child.

I dined on Christmas Day at the Grand Hotel with Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Whitaker, at whose beautiful and hospitable house in Palermo I had once spent some delightful days. It is quite impossible to imagine a kinder host and hostess. "Don Peppino" Whitaker's name is known not only all over Sicily and Italy, but all over the world, in connection with a very celebrated brand of Marsala. Mrs. Whitaker is the author of an extremely interesting book called *Sicily and England*, published by Constable in 1907. I have a copy of it which I value very much indeed, for she gave it to me when the book came out. Though she was born in England and speaks English like an Englishwoman, she is the daughter of a Sicilian patriot, Adolfo Scalia, who fought heroically against the Bourbons when the island rose *en masse* in 1848 to protest against the horrors of their misrule. Signora di Giorgio, their eldest daughter, is the wife of the well-known General who was recently entrusted by Signor Mussolini with the suppression of the Mafia in Sicily. Don Peppino himself, one of the most lovable of men, is always connected in my mind with an amusing little incident which I am sure he won't object to my mentioning here, for the last time we met we all laughed over it together. He was often very late for meals, and would sometimes drop in to dinner when dessert was on the table. Once when I

was living in Rome, and when he and his family were staying at the Grand Hotel, I had tea there with his daughters, and remained chatting with them for some time afterwards. At last it was so near our dinner hour that I got up to go. His youngest daughter, Delia, offered to take me to the lift. As we went down the corridor we noticed that a tray was standing outside one of the doors. She looked at it for a moment, and then she murmured: "Papa's breakfast."

It was nearly eight p.m.!

Immediately after Christmas I took two rooms in the Via Babuino, on the fourth floor of a large house close to the Piazza di Spagna. Lady Mary also moved into an attractive apartment not far off, and we saw a good deal of each other. Her eldest daughter, Gertrude, was married to an Italian, Count Francesco Salamei, and they also lived in Rome.

Another friend whose acquaintance I made in rather amusing circumstances was Lord George Fitzgerald. He was one of the younger sons of the Duke of Leinster, but far from taking any satisfaction in this fact he did his best to conceal it, as if the mere possession of a title was a piece of hateful ostentation. The first time he called at my sister's house in Rome he told the servant to announce him as "il signore Irlandese," and that was the name he went by ever afterwards. We were to have met years ago in Jamaica, where he was secretary to the Governor, Sir Henry Blake; Lady Blake was a sister of the late Duchess of St. Albans, with whom I was slightly acquainted. The latter was so warm-hearted and so absolutely natural that it was quite impossible not to like her. I had met her children's governess, a clever and altogether delightful Frenchwoman, at a little *pension* in Champéry, where during the previous summer we had spent several days together. One day she happened to say how much she would like to see me again. That was more than enough for the kind

Duchess, who immediately asked me to luncheon, put me next to her so that we might have a good talk together, and relegated her own children to a side-table. I liked her so much for her charming attitude to my friend, that when I was going to Chile for the second time, and she asked me if her niece—Miss Blake—who was just leaving school, might travel with me as far as Jamaica, I was only too glad to do anything to oblige her.

It was then arranged that I should break the journey at Jamaica and stay with the Blakes at Government House. Unluckily this scheme had to be abandoned at the last moment on account of one of my young nieces who was to accompany me. She was rather a delicate girl, and her mother—my eldest sister—was so afraid that she would not be able to stand the climate of Panama, where we would have to go on leaving Jamaica, that she entreated me to give up the idea of travelling by that route. I couldn't possibly refuse my sister's request, but it was a great disappointment to me, as I had never been in the West Indies and was longing to go there. What made her specially nervous was the fact that my dear father had died of yellow fever close to Panama, though the day before he had been in perfect health.

After explaining matters to the Duchess, I took our tickets by Rio Janeiro and the Straits of Magellan, in consequence of which I never met Lord George till about ten years later. He was a great friend of my old friend, Harry Humphreys, from whom I received a letter that winter telling me that he had given Lord George a letter of introduction to me, as he was going to spend the winter in Rome. No fixed date was mentioned, and I thought no more about the matter.

The two rooms that I had taken in the Via Babuino opened into each other; a woman whom I had engaged to come and sew by the day usually sat in my bedroom and, among other things, answered

the front door bell. One day she told me that while I was out a "Signore" had called; he had asked for me, but had refused to give her his card or even to tell her his name. This happened several times, and at last I became alarmed and said to the woman: "Whatever you do, don't let him in. You may be quite sure that if he were really a friend of mine he would leave his card with you; I don't want to have anything to do with him, he probably wants to borrow money; I dare say he's a thief."

My amusement can be imagined when at last I received a letter from Lord George saying that he quite despaired of ever finding me at home, and asking me if I would let him know when I was likely to be in. I wrote and told him I really couldn't think of asking him to climb again to the top of the house whose heights he had already scaled so often, and invited him to tea on the following Sunday at the Grand Hotel, adding: "I may be a few minutes late as I'm going to hear Father Maturin preach at San Silvestro, and am not sure when the service will be over." I also said I'd pin a certain flower in my coat so that he might recognize me without difficulty.

I was still on my knees in San Silvestro when Gertrude Salamei tapped me on the shoulder, whispering: "I was just on my way to the Via Babuino to return you *Le Duel*, but I may as well give it to you now." *Le Duel* was a clever and touching play by Henri Lavedan which I had lent her, and in which the principal parts were splendidly acted by Madame Bartet, Monsieur Paul Monnet and Monsieur Le Bargy. The next moment another friend sidled up to me and slipped a cookery-book into my hand! She also had intended leaving it at my rooms, but catching sight of me in church had determined to save herself the extra journey.

I began to feel I'd better make myself scarce before some man friend should take it into his head to press a copy of *Ally Sloper* into my hand, and as I

droye to the Grand Hotel I thought Lord George might well be forgiven if he didn't believe I'd been to church, should he catch sight of a French play and a cookery-book under my arm!

But the moment he saw me he came up laughing, and said, pointing to my flower: "You needn't have bothered about that flower. Your face is quite familiar to me. Harry Humphreys has a capital photograph of you in his sitting-room at Cairo."

After the very informal way we had introduced ourselves to each other, we became good friends. He loved Rome and knew it well, and together we explored parts of the old town which as yet I did not know. He once told me an amusing story about himself and a negro in Jamaica. It seems that in his day the negroes used constantly to turn up at Government House when anything went wrong with them. What is more, they were always given a hearing. One afternoon a poor old darkie made his appearance, looking very woebegone; he had had an accident and had hurt both his arms. He asked for the Governor, but Lord George happened to be the only person at home, and went out to see him. The old fellow wanted advice, as he was in great pain. Lord George hadn't the faintest idea of doctoring, but I suppose he had a vague recollection that on one celebrated occasion a good Samaritan had poured oil and wine into the wounds of a sick man, and he advised him to rub his arms with oil, and pay a visit to the doctor. The old man begged him to perform the operation himself. I don't think he went quite so far as that, but he did actually pour some oil over him without further loss of time. It was still dripping from his arms when the old man reached the surgery.

"You're in a nice mess," said the doctor; "what have you been doing to yourself?"

"I have been doing nothing," said the old negro, "but I was sick and the lord anointed me."

CHAPTER NINE

ONE day—it was in January—there was a scene at my rooms in the Via Babuino. The sewing-woman arrived at a very much later hour than usual, with the tears streaming down her face; she was a tall woman and looked like a Swiss mountain torrent that had been transformed into a human being. She was almost inarticulate with grief. At last she told me between her sobs that Carlino, the dog without whom she refused to stir, and who always followed in her wake like a gentleman-in-waiting—Carlino, the model dog who adored her and whom she worshipped—Carlino, the apple of her eye, had strayed from the paths of duty and—she gasped it out at last—Carlino was lost.

“Perduto, Signora mia! Perduto il mio amore!”

She told me I must forgive her if she couldn't stay and sew for me that morning. She must search Rome. She must wander, like another Demeter, over the seven hills of the Eternal City, if needs be. Who could tell where he was? I certainly couldn't. He might be in the Catacombs. Where *mightn't* he be? Anyhow she must go and look for him. And away she went.

In spite of her almost comical 'distress it was impossible not to feel sorry for her, poor woman, and, being a dog-lover myself, I was able to enter into her feelings.

About four o'clock that same afternoon she rushed into my sitting-room with Carlino on a leash. She looked hot and tired, but radiant. She had been just in time to rescue him from the jaws of death, for she had found him in a sort of asylum for lost dogs where

they were given very little time to repent of their shortcomings. She was almost hysterical with joy. She laughed and cried as she stood over Carlino, who sat on the floor opposite to her looking guilty and ashamed as only dogs can look who have been on a prolonged spree.

"Ah, Carlino!" she cried, "how I have suffered for your sake! How could you have the heart to run away from me? How *could* you? Tu sei . . . tu sei . . ." She paused for a moment, looked him straight in the face, and then for two seconds, indignation got the better of adoration, and she let him know what she really thought of him: "Tu sei un *animale*!"

After this she felt better, took off her hat and coat and retired into my bedroom, Carlino, who really couldn't help being an animal, being driven in front of her and deposited safely at her feet before she settled down to work.

A few days after this episode I left Rome rather suddenly on a visit to Taormina, but as my absence was only to be a short one I kept on my rooms in the Via Babuino. The day after my arrival I heard that a cottage was to be let with quite a nice little bit of ground attached to it; my interest was aroused, and that same morning I went down to have a look at it with the lady who had told me about it. It was beautifully situated on a mountain-side, in full view of the sea and Calabria; the cottage itself was a mere shanty, but I saw at a glance that by adding a top storey it could be made into just the sort of little *pied-à-terre* after which I had been hankering for some time. I hated being without any home at all, and made up my mind to see the proprietor without delay.

I don't know if the peasants of Sicily still adhere to their curious method of dividing their property among their children as at the beginning of this century, when, if they had nothing but a cottage to dispose of, they would leave a room upstairs to one child, a room downstairs to another, and the kitchen to a third,

making it impossible for the house to be let without the consent of all parties. When six or seven people were involved it was almost impossible to come to terms, for the whole family was, as often as not, at loggerheads, and weeks were very often wasted on useless discussions. I once had an experience of the kind and wasn't anxious to repeat it.

This time, however, I was more fortunate. The cottage I had just seen and the ground surrounding it proved to be one man's sole property, and he was perfectly willing—even anxious—to come to business at once. We made an appointment and I went to see him in his house at Taormina.

After mounting a flight of narrow stairs I was shown into a dreadful little room with a few chairs placed against the walls, and a round table in the middle. A bottle of champagne would have gone flat five minutes after it had been dumped down upon it. It was the sort of room in which you couldn't imagine anything ever happening that wasn't dreary and depressing. It looked as if it might just have been vacated by someone with a bilious attack, or acute indigestion accompanied by shooting pains. And it didn't look a bit more cheery during the interview between the proprietor and myself, although a large number of his friends had rallied round him in honour of the occasion. They were all very polite till I mentioned the sum I was prepared to pay—per annum—for the cottage and the bit of ground. (I found out afterwards that I had offered more than three times its actual worth!) But to judge from the storm of indignant protest that broke over my head one would have thought I was trying to cheat the proprietor, whereas it was just the other way round. He was trying to "do" me, and by the way they backed him up, his friends had probably been invited to aid and abet him in fleecing the crazy foreigner, the rich Englishwoman (all English are rich and all Americans millionaires in Taormina) who wouldn't care what

she spent in order to satisfy a caprice, and who would be quite willing to dance to any tune they played.

But my dancing days were over, in every sense of the word, and I stuck to my guns, and proved my Englishness in a way they little expected, and that exasperated them to such a degree that they all began to talk at the same time, their voices growing louder and louder every minute till at last the noise became so deafening that one man, unable to bear it any longer, leaped to his feet and roared: "Zitto, Signori! Zitto! *Zitto per carita cristiana*,"¹ after which he fell back panting into his chair.

During the momentary lull that followed this passionate appeal for silence in the name of Christian charity, I said, with as much British phlegm as I was able to command: "Look here. I've told you again and again what I am willing to give, but now I will tell you something else. If this affair isn't settled within the next five minutes, you can keep your cottage, for I shan't take it, and I mean what I say."

With this I got up to go, but within five minutes the whole affair *was* settled. And that is how I came to live on that lovely mountain-side opposite the view that was the joy of my life till the Messina earthquake drove me out of my home for ever.

It was more than a year before the cottage was fit for habitation, and if it hadn't been for kind Mr. Alex. Hood, who constantly interviewed the builder, and kept him up to the mark as far as it was in any human being's power to do so, it might never have been finished at all—like Cologne Cathedral! Yet a *tête-à-tête* with this gentleman (who eventually blossomed forth into a successful grocer) would have convinced anyone not "in the know" that he was quite equal to running up a replica of the Sphinx in a couple of weeks! "Tutto si puo fare," was his favourite remark. "E niente si fa," was my invariable answer.

¹ "Hush, gentlemen, hush! Hush for the love of Christian charity!"

When the plans for restoring the cottage were ready, and the contract had been signed between the builder and myself, I went back to Rome, where I spent some very happy weeks. As far as I can remember I put all musical work on one side, for Rome absorbed and fascinated me to the exclusion of everything else. I enjoyed every moment of my life there. The cosmopolitan atmosphere appealed to me immensely, and I felt strangely at home from the very first. But above all I loved losing myself in the past, and read every book I could get hold of that was able to throw additional light on the wonders that are summed up in that one word—Rome. No other place in the world has ever succeeded to such a degree in detaching my thoughts from personal worries and anxieties, and what a debt of gratitude one owes to any place, or any person, or indeed to *anything* that is able to accomplish that!

On one occasion—I happened to be staying in Rome—I remember writing the following words to a friend: “Should I ever have to face some great sorrow I only hope I may find myself in Rome at the time, for I am quite certain I could bear it far better here than anywhere else.”

Many years later I was called upon to go through some months of mental anxiety that I can hardly bear to think of even now, though it all happened long ago. During part of that time I was in Rome, and I realized that my instinct had not been at fault. Many of us take a violent dislike to places where we have been very miserable, and where we have been compelled to struggle in the dark with that dread enemy uncertainty—uncertainty as to the ultimate issue of events entirely beyond our control. But I had always loved Rome, loved her as now and again we love a rare human being in whom our trust is complete, whom we cannot even imagine “going back” on us, and when I found that she didn’t fail me in my hour of need, I loved her better than ever.

I returned to Taormina in the early spring, to see how the cottage was getting on. It—or rather its architect, was—to use an expression dear to the Sicilian—only *thinking* of getting on! And an enormous amount of thought was evidently necessary before embarking on the Herculean task of building three rooms above the three that already existed on the ground floor of my future home. No doubt he was still waiting for the brain-wave that was to wash him ashore on to some wonderful sphere—of action! The odds were against his having received a classical education, but his subconscious mind must have rejoiced from earliest youth in the congenial advice of the celebrated adage: “*Festina lente.*”

After several interviews with him it became increasingly clear to me that I should have to possess my soul in patience, and that the ceremony of blessing the new roof-tree would have to be put off for a considerable time. Having come to this conclusion, and hoping for the best, while fully prepared for the worst, I took some pleasant rooms at the far end of the town, near the Porta Catania, in a rambling old house with a fascinating and mysterious little garden entered from a room on the first floor, and which was completely hidden between the walls of the house and some other crazy old walls surrounding it.

On the day of my arrival the uncle of my landlady presented me with a splendid bunch of Madonna lilies. He sent them round by an urchin with bright brown eyes, like those of an intelligent and impudent squirrel. After handing me the flowers, which I at once began to place about the room, he remained standing in the doorway, following all my movements with the greatest attention, not to say suspicion. If ever a human being was born to be a successful detective, it was that small boy. He looked round the room as if he were making a mental inventory of every article in it, and had anything been missing after I had taken my departure, he would, I am sure,

have been quite ready with his version of *J'accuse*, etc. But I, poor middle-aged innocent, was taken in at first. I thought he was lost in admiration of my new quarters, and the way I was arranging the flowers, and when I said enthusiastically: "Isn't this a charming room, Francesco? Doesn't it look lovely with all these beautiful flowers?" I was little prepared for the snub that was lying in wait for me. Without a moment's hesitation he answered: "A Lei piace, a me no."¹ This was rapped out with such merciless emphasis that for a moment I rather felt as if the little creature had dashed a jug of cold water in my face. And then I couldn't help laughing. Oriental blood runs in the veins of a good many Sicilians, but on that occasion, at any rate, I didn't suspect young Francesco of being a lineal descendant of the late Ananias and Sapphira.

My landlady was a tall, thin woman who also went in for plain speaking. That same day she asked me what I would like for luncheon.

I said: "Maccaroni."

As she placed the dish before me at midday she said sardonically: "Eat that and grow fatter than ever." She then flounced out of the room. Perhaps she thought I would be so horrified at the prospect of putting on an extra pound before nightfall that I would leave it untouched, in which case it would come in very conveniently for her own luncheon! But I took the risk and emptied the dish.

While I was living there Tony and Mary de Navarro, accompanied by Robert Hichens, paid a visit to Taormina. They had all been spending part of the winter in Rome. I remember going to the station to meet them. I was anxious to do the honours of Taormina to the Navarros from the very beginning. I felt almost responsible for the lovely little mountain town! Had there been a downpour of rain that day I felt that I, and I alone, would have

¹ "You like it, I don't."

been to blame for every drop. George Fitzgerald used to call me the "Begum of Taormina," and though I retaliated by calling him the "Begorra of Kilkae" (his home in Ireland), I secretly felt that if sheer love of a place entitled anyone to its possession, I most certainly fulfilled that condition.

The day on which they arrived was radiantly beautiful. Taormina was looking her best and came up even to my expectations, and I drove down to the station on the coast in the best of spirits. When the train failed to make its appearance at the hour at which it was due, I can't say I was surprised. In those days unpunctuality—on a grandiose scale—was the order of the day and *pazienza* was a word that was heard at every turn. But after waiting for more than an hour I began to feel nervous. I waited at that station half the morning. At last the station-master received a wire from Messina, to say the train was on its way, and he passed on the news to me. What he *didn't* tell me was that there had been a nasty accident in Calabria. Fortunately my friends escaped with nothing worse than a bad shaking, and made light of the whole incident. They had thoroughly enjoyed the journey from Messina to Taormina, and well they might, for it is really lovely, and told me how they had laughed over a little episode that had taken place as they rushed past the orange groves on the coast. R. H., who was as anxious as I was that they should be favourably impressed with the beloved island, had held forth persistently and enthusiastically on its charm and beauty. I can see him now drawing their attention to the soft and balmy air, to the splendid blue of sky and sea, to the mountains, to the shepherds driving their goats before them on the yellow sands, to the trailing masses of scarlet geranium that decorated every little wayside station, to the picturesque ruins of old medieval castles perched high above the great rocks that line the Messina carriage road, and dwelling above all on the

exquisite perfume of orange blossom that was being wafted through the open window into the carriage and that seemed to linger there in some mysterious way, even after the orange groves had been left behind. And from all they told me I can imagine that this is more or less like what he said:

"Now, Mrs. Tony, you must acknowledge that your beloved Broadway isn't in it with this Paradise on earth. Did you ever in all your life smell anything so delicious, so suggestive of romance as this heavenly scent of orange blossoms. . . ."

The words died on his lips. In the opposite corner of the carriage an old gentleman sat sucking an orange. And on a newspaper beside him lay a heaped-up mass of orange peel! . . .

The Navarros only spent a few days in Taormina. In spite of all our rhapsodies I am afraid they—or at all events Mary—didn't appreciate it to the same degree that we did. It is rural England that she loves beyond all other countries. And she is not really fond of travelling, though now she generally divides her winters between Brussels and Rome, where her husband and their only son—the youngest don at Trinity College, Cambridge—both hold the post of Chamberlain to the Holy Father, a post which necessitates at least a fortnight's annual residence within the walls of Rome.

The following year when my cottage (which had already received the name of "Casa Felice") was actually nearing completion, I was invited to go to Egypt, to stay for some weeks with my dear old friend, Harry Humphreys. The address I had to give my friends on my departure was somewhat embarrassing for a self-respecting spinster. For I had been invited to no less a place than a harem by my cheery friend. True, it was innocent of odalisques and all the usual personnel of a harem; equally true that his own mother had begged me "not to fail him," equally

true that nothing was farther from my thoughts, and quite undeniable that it was only its old name that had stuck to the house. But still . . . wasn't it possible for my letters to be forwarded to a less sensational address?

I was told that I might have them addressed to the Bachelor's Club in Cairo!

It had been suggested to me that while in Egypt I should give a concert at the celebrated new opera house where Verdi's *Aida* was performed for the first time in honour of the opening of the Suez Canal. I was quite willing to do so, especially as Lady Valda Machell (formerly Countess Valda Gleichen) and Harry Humphreys had offered to do all the tiresome business part for me. Lord Cromer was "British Agent" at that time, and his wife, who before her marriage was Lady Katie Thynne, was also willing to back me up with all the weight of her influence and all the kindness of the pleasant friendship that had existed between us for a good many years. Placards announcing the concert were posted up all over Cairo, in all the hotels and on all the dahabeeyahs going up and down the Nile, with the result that when I arrived in Cairo everything was in working order, and on the day of the concert we had a splendid house. Kind Lady Valda had hunted up all the local talent to assist me, and though I can't remember them all I particularly recollect a charming young Austrian singer, the wife, I believe, of a German official, who had not only a pretty voice but a pretty face, *ce qui n'a jamais gaté rien*. She sang several of my German and French songs with a good deal of feeling and spirit, and so did Lady Valda, who gave a group of my German songs, winding up with "Fahrwohl du goldne Sonne," which she sang really beautifully. It was a setting of a German Volkslied and suited her to perfection. She had also engaged the services of a Spanish baritone, who, among other things, sang a Spanish serenade of mine with charming

words by Espronceda. I can't remember what I played for my first and second solos, but I remember the third one for it is connected with a very unexpected and touching little episode to which I will refer later on. It consisted of a collection of pieces to which I had given the title "From the Ionian Sea," and included a setting of my beloved *Pastorale*, another of the *Tarantella di Taormina*, and yet another of a gay and extraordinarily exhilarating folk-song which I heard sung for the first time by a little Sicilian bricklayer. There was something devil-may-care, something happy-go-lucky about it that appealed to me quite irresistibly, so entirely did it express the *joie de vivre* that had companioned me during those radiant and unforgettable days of my first year in Sicily. I always enjoyed playing it.

The moment I saw the packed opera house and the attractive way the stage had been arranged (it looked more like a pretty flower-filled drawing-room than anything else), I felt convinced that all would go well. Several boxes were occupied by ladies of the Egyptian Court, who sat behind carved wooden screens that hid them entirely from view, and Lady Cromer (who fortunately was *not* hidden from view as she was quite beautiful) had taken one of the large boxes well to the front, which she had filled with her friends. The audience was in the best of tempers, and when dear Harry Humphreys appeared on the stage in order to raise the lid of the grand piano on which I was to play, he received an ovation that any operatic star might have envied, and that sent him back to the wings doubled up with laughter and hardly able to lead me on to the stage. This rousing welcome and unexpected tribute to his short, but very necessary, contribution to the evening's entertainment created an immediate atmosphere of friendliness and goodwill, and I can say without any contradiction that his was one of the most successful appearances that evening, though owing to an oversight little

short of criminal, the peculiar nature of his performance had not even been hinted at on the program. However there was no need for that. As Lady Cromer once said, "He is the most popular man in Egypt," and the truth of her words was most certainly proved on the evening of my concert.

After paying all the expenses connected with the concert I cleared £150. Lady Valda and H. H. decided in truly parental fashion that I was not to be allowed to spend a penny of it, and that it was all to be sent to Coutts's Bank. But I begged so hard to be allowed to keep at least £40 to take back to Taormina, and ten more to spend in Egypt, that their hearts melted and I had my own way, whereupon I rushed off (unaccompanied!) to the principal book-seller's in the town and bought all the books I had been coveting for weeks. One of them was a volume of Egyptian fairy tales collected by Monsieur Maspero from hieroglyphics which actually contained an Egyptian version of Cinderella. I also bought two Persian vases and a very nice rug. These I found in the bazaar.

Once the concert was over I was able to devote myself to sight-seeing, and never did I enjoy anything more. Monsieur Maspero, who was at the head of the Museum at that time, was a friend of H. H.'s and took us over the greater part of it himself. It will be a long time before I forget the uncanny story he told us one morning in connection with the arrival of the coffin containing the mummy of the celebrated Pharaoh mentioned in the Bible, and in whose reign the Exodus took place. This coffin, with several others, was unpacked one morning by Monsieur Maspero and some Arab attendants. By the time they had finished their task it was about midday, and Monsieur Maspero went back to lunch at his house which was close by. While he was still at table the Arab who had been left in charge of the mummies

rushed into the room, pale and breathless, evidently the prey to some violent emotion.

"Monsieur," he said in a trembling voice, "Monsieur, the Pharaoh has moved! I have just seen him raise his hand!"

The man's terror was so great that it impressed Monsieur Maspero in spite of himself, but that he was the victim of his imagination was naturally suggested to him the next moment. But he returned at once to the room in which the mummies were lying in a row exposed to view.

"I confess," he said, "that what I saw gave me a shock." The Pharaoh's arm, which had been lying by his side, was now raised, as though in indignant protest against the outrage to which he had been submitted. Of course Monsieur Maspero at once sought for some natural cause to account for this extraordinary phenomenon, and wondered whether the tremendous heat of the sun, which was pouring into the room and on to this particular mummy, could have anything to do with it. I don't know what conclusion he arrived at, but he told us that though he had done his best to lower the arm, and to place it once more against the Pharaoh's side, he had not been entirely successful. He was so afraid of breaking it that he gave up the attempt and was obliged to leave the lower part of the arm still slightly raised. And that is how I saw it when I visited the Museum with him in 1905.

I can imagine nothing more calculated to terrify a human being than to be alone in a room surrounded by mummies who had been embalmed for thousands of years, and then to witness on the part of one of them what must have appeared like the first symptom of resurrection!

Many years later I told the story to Madame Olga Moussine-Pouchkine, a distinguished Russian actress, and an intimate friend of mine. I was very much interested to hear that she also had known Monsieur

Maspero. They had met—in France—at the house of a common friend, Madame Janon de St. Juste, with whom they had stayed for a week or so. One day it was suggested that they should all drive out to Port-Royal where the château of Madame de St. Juste was situated. Madame Pouchkine and Monsieur Maspero shared a victoria, and during the drive, which was a long one, the conversation turned on occultism, a subject in which Madame Pouchkine took a deep interest.

“Tell me,” she said, “you, Monsieur Maspero, who have lived so long in the East and must have seen many strange things there, do you believe in supernatural phenomena?”

This is what he answered: “In the case of fifty per cent. of these phenomena which I myself have witnessed, there was not sufficient proof to justify a *categorical* denial of their supernatural character; the nature of twenty-five per cent. has been proved to me as supernatural, and I am quite willing to believe the same of the remaining twenty-five. There is no doubt,” he added gravely, “that certain phenomena take place on a plane of which contemporary science has no knowledge whatsoever.”

Unfortunately circumstances arose which prevented my kind host from taking me up the Nile in his dahabeeyah with some other friends. His chief fell ill, it was impossible for him to get away, and the time that was to have been dedicated to the temples in the south was all spent in Cairo. I was bitterly disappointed, but at all events I was able to familiarize myself with Cairo and its environs to an extent that would hardly have been possible had I not spent so many weeks there. H. H. had a little car, and when he was off duty we used to go sight-seeing. I was rather amused to hear that some native urchins once called him “the father of smells,” on account of the petrol which they saw him pouring into the petrol tank on one of our excursions.

Our first visit was, of course, to the Pyramids of Ghizeh and the Sphinx. Never have I felt so humiliated as when I stood beneath the latter—never have I felt so crushed, and not, alas, by the tremendous impression produced upon me by the Sphinx, whom indeed it is impossible for almost anyone to contemplate when in a normal frame of mind without a feeling of overpowering awe and endless wonder, but by the ugly fact that I seemed—at that moment at any rate—to be absolutely incapable of receiving any impression whatsoever from that wonder of the world. I might have been a stone or any other inanimate object.

And it was only one of a series of humiliating experiences of the same kind, for I can recall a great many instances of similar numbness—of similar incapacity for instinctive and eager appreciation of other great works of art. I have even heard great music for the first time—music that has roused the enthusiastic admiration of a vast audience but which has failed to stir me. In fact, I must sadly acknowledge that many fine pieces of music, many fine pictures would have been wasted on me had I only heard or seen them once, though I have—thank God—nearly always been given a second and third chance to know and love them. Perhaps there are certain kinds of beauty in the domain of art that take longer to penetrate to my brain than to the brains of most art-lovers.

I certainly feel much more *immediately* responsive to music that is romantically beautiful, and above all to music (or any other art) that not only successfully expresses sincere human emotion—from exquisite tenderness to passion at white heat—but that is also able to awaken a certain indescribable nostalgia, or to flood both heart and soul with that wonderful ecstasy on whose radiant wings we fly upward into the very heart of the blue, where we catch a glimpse of all we have ever longed for.

CHAPTER TEN

THAT same day we visited the Great Pyramid of Khufu, and together explored its dark, mysterious passages. I'm thankful I didn't know then what I know now after reading Sir E. Wallis Budge's book, *The Dwellers on the Nile*. In the preface of this book he says :

"The whole question of the Egyptian belief in the existence of vampires has been discussed with characteristic learning and abundant references to original sources by Professor H. Wiedemann in *Der lebende Leichnam im Glauben der alten Ägypter* (Elberfeld, 1917). According to him the mummification of the body after removing the heart and viscera, the bandaging of the same, the nailed anthropoid coffin and sarcophagus, the well-constructed tomb with its walled-up doorway and shafts filled with stones and concealed entrance, were all intended to keep the deceased in his tomb and to prevent him from coming back among the living, and working his will upon them, and Wiedemann has shown that the belief in immortality went hand in hand with the belief in the existence of *the living corpse in the tomb*."

How could any human being enjoy a moment's happiness while entertaining the belief that their beloved dead (or *any* dead) were "living corpses," who might at any moment creep out of their tombs in order to feed on the lives of the living! The idea is so ghastly that it is no wonder that the mere thought of such a thing has terrified generations of poor ignorant people in every part of the world from time immemorial. How the ancient Egyptians could associate

this horrible belief with their belief in immortality seems utterly incomprehensible.

The feeling of relief with which one emerges from the dreadful gloom of that stupendous tomb into the fresh air is beyond description. It is such a joy after wandering through its sinister recesses to be once more surrounded by the illimitable desert with its instantaneous and almost intoxicating suggestion of liberty.

I wish I could remember more clearly the details of the many beautiful mosques with which Cairo abounds and which I naturally went to see. But I can't. I was not able to go sight-seeing alone, it wasn't always possible for my kind host to accompany me, and I don't think I ever saw any of the mosques more than once, though I should have loved to visit them again and again. But there is another curious reason which accounts for my inability to remember accurately what I saw of them. The moment I find myself in a purely Oriental atmosphere for the first time, I feel almost hypnotized. My thoughts seem to recede into a fantastic region created by my own imagination, in which I only half realize what is actually before my eyes. This being so, I naturally carry away only a hazy recollection of what I see, especially when it is seen but once. But I shall never forget one scene that took place just outside a mosque we were visiting and which, as far as I can remember, was situated in the very heart of the native quarter.

We were suddenly startled from our sight-seeing by strange barbaric sounds that penetrated to us from the street below, and that increased in volume every moment, until at last they became positively deafening. Our curiosity was aroused, and we ran out on to a sort of stone balcony just in time to see a procession that looked like a page out of the *Arabian Nights* translated into real life and flung at our feet. A great camel, bearing a palanquin on its back and gaily bedecked with Oriental draperies, was slowly making its way through a dense crowd, followed by other

camels, also hung with draperies, and carrying riders in strange Eastern costumes.

Inside the palanquin must have been someone of importance, to judge by the immense number of people who were following. Dusky, half-naked men—Nubians as far as I could see—ran in front of the camels uttering strange cries and brandishing swords, while the roar of the tom-toms, mingling with the shouts of the multitude, produced an indescribable effect of excitement, not to say savagery. The next moment they had all vanished; the street was empty: it was difficult to believe one hadn't dreamed the whole thing.

I came across a very different sight a few days later, though I dare say equally characteristic of the country. One morning, out walking, I saw a boy of about seven years old whom I took for a little negro. On approaching him I found to my horror that the unfortunate little creature's face was entirely covered by flies; they lay there absolutely motionless as though glued to his skin. The child made no effort to brush away this living and hideous mask; he seemed quite unconcerned, though the mere sight of it was so revolting that it made one feel ill. I was told afterwards that this state of things is not only tolerated, but was, at that time, actually encouraged by Egyptian mothers of the lower classes. Dreading lest their children should attract the notice of foreign unbelievers who might cast the spell of the evil eye upon them, they sought by this means to deflect their attention.

. Another time I saw a strange and pathetic sight outside one of the big mosques. A poor woman, unveiled, was dragging herself on her knees across the courtyard, and licking the pavement as she went along. No one paid the slightest attention to her. It was evidently no unusual occurrence. Her poor tongue must have been nearly raw. I was told she was fulfilling a vow in the hopes of obtaining a Divine

favour. I only hope her prayers were granted, for she looked desperate.

When H. H. was off duty we sometimes went to the bazaars. At that time they were all roofed in. I must say I loved these excursions, and specially remember a visit to the Street of the Jewellers, where I wished to buy some turquoises. There was no question of entering the shop where I finally made up my mind to spend my money: it was far too small! The Arab in possession sat cross-legged behind a counter, in the midst of an erection that looked like a deep cupboard from which the door had been removed, and his customers stood outside and bargained with him from the street. It was furnished from top to bottom with shelves, on which lay hundreds of little bags filled with various stones. After informing the merchant what you wanted to buy, he would empty bag after bag on to the counter for you to make your choice.

I finally bought two beautifully shaped stones for the trifling sum of four shillings apiece, which later on I had made into ear-rings. Of course they were not the purely blue turquoises, which are far more expensive than those I bought, but, fortunately for me, I very much prefer those of a greener shade. The blue ones, I know, are considered far more beautiful by most people, but to me they look cold and uninteresting, whereas those stones bordering on green have something warm and far more attractive about them. The first make me think of New York or Chicago, the latter of Damascus or Samarcand. I remember seeing one of these greenish stones years ago—a square one which had been made into a pendant. An Arab inscription was engraved upon it in an exquisite shade of gold, and it was surrounded by tiny brilliants. The effect was perfectly beautiful.

Baroness Hildegard von Hügel, the second daughter of the late Baron Friederich von Hügel, was spending that winter in Egypt, at Helouan, with

her elder sister, Gertrude, who had been sent there in search of health. Hildegard was a beautiful and striking girl, tall, and very graceful, with masses of lovely corn-coloured hair, and deep blue eyes beneath eyebrows that were almost black. She looked like a very well-bred Russian. As a matter of fact, she had Russian blood in her veins; her great-grandmother was a Vorontzoff, who married the Earl of Pembroke, her mother's grandfather. She happened to be spending a few days in Cairo with Lady Cromer who, to vary the monotony of her life at Helouan, had invited her to some balls, and this gave me an opportunity to see something of her. I admired her very much, not only for her beauty, but for a gallant, a gay unselfishness that I have hardly ever seen equalled. Young and lovable, her own happiness seemed to be the last thing to which she laid any claim during that not long life which she devoted ungrudgingly to those members of her family who stood in need of her. Hildegard's appearance and personality suggested the life of a happy wife and mother, of a brilliant and successful hostess, the mistress of a beautiful home in beautiful surroundings. She was a woman with all a woman's natural desires and aspirations. But when those human desires and natural longings clashed with what she looked upon as her duty either to God or man, she gave them up. And one has to be a woman oneself to know what it is to give up—deliberately—those things that are the very breath of one's life. There was something indestructibly noble in her nature, as there was in that of her father, of whom I once heard Father Maturin say, not only with conviction, but with wonderful tenderness: "Freddy von Hügel is a saint." And his daughter was worthy of him.

One day while she was staying with Lady Cromer at the British Agency, she asked me whether I would care to go with her to see Lady Anne Blunt, the wife of Wilfred Scawen Blunt, who spent the greater part

of his life in Egypt, and who tried to identify himself so completely with the Arabs that he even went about in the dress of an Arab sheikh, and insisted on his wife and daughter dressing like Eastern women! I was told by someone who knew him very well that the Arabs themselves looked upon him as not quite in his right mind. He was certainly not a *persona grata* with Lord Cromer. But he was a very gifted man—some of his poetry is beautiful; he was also a great lover of animals. Ouida, who knew him well, called him *the standard-bearer of lost causes*, but from all I have heard from an English friend of my own, who knew him intimately, he must have been as uncomfortably eccentric as Ouida herself, and exceedingly difficult—not to say impossible—to deal with. His country house, if I remember rightly, was not far from Helouan, where he had a wonderful stud of thoroughbred Arab horses.

Lady Anne, who was alone in the house, very kindly took us to see these beautiful creatures the day that H. H. motored us over to call upon her. How I should have enjoyed a gallop into the desert on the back of one of those horses; but I had been disabled by two bad accidents in Broadway which made riding quite impossible even when I was comparatively young, and which, alas, have left results that make the daily business of living not only difficult, but often very painful.

One thing, however, is certain; when self-pity clamours for entrance, the man (or woman) who has been deprived of physical powers must turn the key in the lock. He must be firm, like the little Belgian boy in the famous *Punch* cartoon of 1914, facing the German giant, who would invade his native land, with the brave words: "*On ne passe pas.*" And then he will realize how possible it is to be happy even when his loss is emphasized by the oncoming years.

I spent some very happy hours at Lady Valda Machell's house, where I often met agreeable and

interesting people, among others Marmaduke Pickthall, the author of *Saad, the Fisherman*, which I have been told on good authority shows a better and more intimate knowledge of Eastern life than anything ever written by a European. He lived for many years in Syria—in Damascus, I believe—and spoke Arabic to perfection. At her house I also met Monsieur Maspero again. He was very fond of music, and I remember one evening playing to him that beautiful and inspired song of Saint-Saëns, *Après un Rêve*, which was a favourite of his, and which to me, for some unaccountable reason, always suggests tragic romance in some wild and sun-bathed land of the South. So many of Saint-Saëns' compositions leave me cold, but this song—his *Suite Algérienne*, and his *Danse Macabre* must surely compel any unprejudiced musician's admiration, for the two first are musical pictures glowing with colour and wonderfully suggestive, while the *Danse Macabre* is the most perfect "ghost story without words" that it is possible to conceive.

Once I lunched with Lady Valda and her kind and charming husband on their cosy dahabeeyah. I had never been on one before. There I had my first glimpse of what it might mean to float leisurely up the Nile in a boat to which no intruders had access—of what it might mean to drift slowly towards the south in view of the Libyan Hills, to watch the fantastic beauty of sunrise and sunset, to dream the days away in a glory of golden light to the sound of the boatmen's songs, and above all, of what it might mean to escape from this workaday world, of which we sometimes grow so desperately weary, and to live in peace, in perfect peace for a few perfect weeks with a beloved comrade.

One evening we were invited by Mr. Mitchell Innes to dine at his house on the banks of the Nile. He told us that he had engaged some Arab musicians for my special benefit, and that they would play for us

after dinner. I was looking forward immensely to hearing them, for I had never forgotten the impression made upon me by the music of the Algerian Arabs of the desert. Mr. Mitchell Innes' house was charming, the situation perfect, the host kindness itself, and I hadn't the shadow of a doubt that the Arab music would put the finishing touch to the evening's enjoyment. After dinner we went into the room where the musicians were assembled. They were typical Orientals; in their hands they held strange, unfamiliar instruments that would, presently pour forth the wild music of the desert, the love songs and dances of their race. My disappointment can be imagined when they persisted in playing nothing but banal and vilely harmonized potpourris of popular comic operas. I could have cried with disappointment, and was thankful when they took themselves off after a final and appalling performance of "God Save the King."

The next time I heard the National Anthem was under very different conditions. A young Egyptian clerk in H. H.'s office informed him one day that he was going to be married, and that he would feel very much honoured if he would attend the marriage festivities. I don't know if the invitation was given verbally or in writing. (Sometimes H. H. received very respectful letters indeed, beginning: "Most enormous Sir.") But however it was given, he accepted the invitation and asked if I might be allowed to accompany him, whereupon an invitation was immediately extended to me.

On the evening of the feast we motored to a part of the town quite unknown to me. Preparations had been made on an extensive scale, for not only was the house *en fête* but the little street in which it was situated had been entirely covered over with tarpaulin, carpeted and furnished, and turned into a reception and supper-room, crowded with people and full of tables laden with drinks and cakes. That was the first

surprise in store for us. The second was still more startling, for as we made our appearance at the far end of the banqueting-hall, filled entirely with men alone, the Arab musicians with one accord struck up "God Save the King," and everyone looked towards us and bowed! H. H. whispered hurriedly in my ear: "For heaven's sake don't laugh. Take it seriously, or they'll be offended." I'm bound to say we both rose gallantly to the occasion and did our hectic best to look like a king and queen. H. H. in the twinkling of an eye suggested to everyone present not only that he had signed Magna Charta, cut off the heads of several wives, had his own cut off for a change, "got gay" at Brighton in a cut-away coat and satin breeches and an enormous curled and powdered wig, but that he had won the Derby and the hearts of all his subjects, in clothes like anyone else and a Homburg hat, to say nothing of golden opinions wherever he went—while I in the meantime tried to look as if I had held drawing-rooms and opened bazaars ever since I opened my eyes, laid foundation-stones by the hundred, broken bottles of champagne over men-of-war, been photographed times out of number (and looking as if I liked it!) between bishops in aprons, admirals in cocked hats and matrons of hospitals, attended by nurses in immaculate caps and aprons. Fortunately none of our friends were there to jeer at us as we made our way down the room, bowing and smiling "as to the manner born."

When our royal progress was at an end we were offered a drink and some little cakes which we graciously accepted. And then we sat down. An entertainment had evidently been going on, for as soon as we were seated an old man, who looked as if he had been interrupted in the middle of his performance, began to sing again. He was seated cross-legged in the centre of the room, on what looked like a deal table, and was dressed in a flowing white robe, with a turban round his head. If he was a profes-

sional singer I can't say that the parents of the bride had been fortunate in the artist of their choice, for his voice was cracked, and his singing was like the mournful bleating of a distracted sheep as he swayed to and fro, never singing for more than a few seconds at a time. Whenever he paused there was applause and a subdued murmur of "Ah—ah—ah" ran through the audience. Then the old man bowed and smiled, raised a glass to his lips, took a sip, and began all over again.

This happened so often that I felt as if Eternity had set in, and was just about to succumb to a feeling bordering on desperation when, during one of the pauses, I was asked if I would like to make the acquaintance of the bride. I eagerly accepted the invitation, and was escorted into the house and up to the first floor by her brother, a small boy in a tarbush who had not yet attained the age when the women's apartments become forbidden ground. On reaching what I suppose was the drawing-room I found myself in a strange company indeed! The room was crowded with women. The poor bride, little more than a child, was sitting on the floor looking dazed and worn out. I was told afterwards that she had probably been drugged in order to enable her to go through the fatigue of the monotonous and interminable festivities that precede an Oriental marriage. A professional dancer, dressed in the flimsiest of gauze garments, through which the greater part of her body was visible, was wriggling about in the middle of the room performing the *danse du ventre* for the delectation of the ladies present. Egyptians, Levantines, Nubians, etc., were present, and an enormous negress in a cretonne ball-dress, *décolletée* and trimmed with swansdown, was performing the duties of hostess, and going from guest to guest smiling and talking.

Every now and again the small boy put his head in at the door, and after a few minutes walked up to me and said solemnly: "Are you happy?" I said

MY INDIAN SUMMER

I was, though I felt horribly sorry for the bride who hadn't even seen, much less spoken to, the man to whom she was presently to be handed over for the rest of her life. Towards ten o'clock the little brother appeared once more in the doorway and informed me that I was wanted downstairs. "The Father of Smells" was evidently anxious to go home. And so was I!

It was a long time before I could get that poor little girl out of my head.

More than anything I saw in Cairo did the Coptic Church stamp itself on my mind, but certainly not because of any intrinsic beauty of its own, though it contains many beautiful things. It is situated in what is called "The Old Town," and never was name more appropriate. To this day I can remember the exact impression produced upon me as we drove down the long and narrow street that leads to it; on both sides were tall, ramshackle houses apparently about to crumble into dust; every surrounding thing seemed to be in the last stages of decay. The church at that time conveyed an impression of great age—what the Germans call *ur-alt*, and reminded me, from that point of view, of the old Jewish synagogue in Prague with its sad little cemetery, where the neglected tombstones seem falling to pieces from sheer weariness. A feeling of acute depression took possession of me and increased, as we wandered with our guide through this forlorn and cheerless church, which was full of wooden screens which divided it into different parts.¹

But this feeling of depression vanishes as you step into the little crypt of this strange church and become aware of an atmosphere in which still lingers something mystic that it is impossible to describe. You are no longer conscious of death and decay, but of Eternal Love.

¹ The conditions are quite different now.

There is a tradition that the home of the Holy Family during their stay in Egypt was on the site where this crypt now stands.

My happy visit was drawing to a close. I had received the welcome news that my cottage—Casa Felice—would be finished and ready for me to live in by the time I returned.

It was April. I knew—no one better—how lovely Taormina would be looking, and I was longing to see my new home. I secured a ticket for a steamer belonging to the Florio Rubatino line that was leaving for Messina, and Harry Humphreys saw me off at Alexandria. But I didn't reach the beloved island without going through twenty-four hours of dreadful anxiety.

Just as we were approaching Messina we were told that an Arab on board had been taken ill, and the doctor of the ship was afraid that he had been stricken with the plague, in which case we should all have to be detained on a little island near Naples for ten days before being allowed to land in Sicily, in case of having contracted the disease ourselves. The news created a panic among some of the passengers—and no wonder! I did my best to behave decently, but I was horribly frightened. Next morning, to our unmitigated relief, we were told there was no danger, and things took their usual course.

And the first person I saw on the landing-stage was Giovannino, my dear, devoted servant who came to me twenty-four years ago when he was nineteen, and who is still one of the most faithful friends I possess.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

NEEDLESS to say the cottage was not finished when I arrived in Sicily. Giovannino informed me of this as soon as I set foot on the island. So I went to stay at the Hôtel Timeo, and while I was there the touching little episode occurred to which I referred in a former chapter when giving an account of the Cairo concert.

One afternoon a card was brought to me. There was the name of a Russian lady on it, and on the card was written: "Introduced by Lady Cromer." I was told that the lady was waiting on the terrace, and went up to see her. After a few preliminary words she said to me:

"I am only staying for this one day in Taormina. I came here on purpose to see you."

I was very much astonished.

"I was at the concert you gave in Cairo," she continued. "When you played those pieces, 'From the Ionian Sea,' you conveyed to me such a sensation of radiant happiness—your own personal happiness—that I longed for you never to lose it. I think I might teach you something that would enable you to retain it."

She looked at me very kindly as she said these words. And then we had a long conversation. Like many Russians she was a believer in occult science. She was firmly convinced that those who believed in it were able to control their lives to a far greater extent than those who know nothing about it. But it seemed to me we did not mean the same thing by the word "happiness." That radiant vision which materializes for some of us, and remains with us for

short or long periods, *cannot* be retained by any effort of our own will. What she wanted to give me was the knowledge how to obtain "peace of mind." And "peace of mind," one of the most precious of all God's gifts, is not "happiness." There is ecstasy in happiness. The greatest saints have known that ecstasy, which is a characteristic of both human and Divine happiness, at its height.

I was immensely touched by the visit of that Russian woman. It was a beautiful and unselfish impulse that led her to seek me out, but I don't think it lies in the power of any human being to uproot my own conception of that wonderful word—"happiness."

I can't say I was surprised when on my return from Egypt I was unable to move into my cottage. Having seen my architect at work for about a year before I went away, I knew that he could hardly be described as a "hustler"; his methods were more like those of a drugged tortoise. What I didn't know was that he had been dreaming dreams which, as a rule, are not indulged in by aspirants to architectural fame.

In a former chapter I divulged the fact that he wound up his career as a grocer. No doubt during my absence, instead of putting those finishing touches to Casa Felice that were to be its crowning glory and to put him on a par with Sir Edwin Lutyens, for example, he had been very differently employed. He had been feverishly pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp (disguised as a grocer's store) that had lured him far away from architecture and its many problems and was still urging him to forsake rafters and beams for pots of Scotch marmalade and English jam, which—in a vision—he saw himself selling by hundreds and thousands to the British tourists who poured into Taormina every winter and spring and who refused to be comforted when they found themselves unable to procure the delicacies to which they were accustomed at home.

News travels quickly nowadays, and perhaps he had even heard all about the painful scene in a certain Venetian café (a scene vouched for by an intimate friend of my own who—sometimes—speaks the truth) when an English clergyman had left the premises, exasperated and embittered because the wretched *padrone* had not obliged him with a cup of Tibbles Vi-Cocoa. Perhaps my architect had realized that there were thousands of Britishers like him, and that his balance at the local bank would rise by leaps and bounds if he deserted the path of Michelangelo and Bramante to walk in the far more remunerative one of Messrs. Tibble, Chivers, Cross and Blackwell, etc.

But his dreams, fortunately for me, had not materialized by the time I returned from Egypt, and goaded into activity by the combined efforts of Sir Alex. Hood, Giovannino and myself he set to work in real earnest, and at last announced that the cottage was fit for habitation and that I might begin to furnish it. This was accomplished in a very short time. My next move was to engage a cook who came one day and gave notice the next. I couldn't imagine why. Only later did I hear that I had been the victim of an entirely fictitious *combinazione*, a convenient word by which most things that require explanation are described—in Taormina, at all events—by people of old Catina's social standing. With that same word would they sum up a revolution or a pimple. And very rightly too, for as far as I am aware, neither revolutions nor pimples come under the head of "first causes" and it is only logical to look upon them as *combinazione*. I remember one hot morning, at luncheon, making some remark about the extraordinary number of flies on the window-pane; the woman who was serving me glanced at them for a moment, and then said—and there was a note of absolute finality in her voice: "Qualche combinazione, Signora."

My cook had been told by *Tutti*—another convenient and non-compromising word—that on dark nights thieves climbed up the precipice at the far end of my garden, and that as far as I was concerned I was *pazza*. Everyone in the place knew that “La Whitey” spent hours and hours working, at what they didn’t quite know, but it was something connected with music; *Tutti* had been given to understand that she was a *Signora per bene*, but what genuine *Signora per bene* would work for hours on end at *anything* unless she had taken leave of her senses? Catina was assured that “La Whitey” was mad and that she had much better have nothing to do with her. The poor old woman had swallowed all these alarming statements and was too frightened to remain!

Nevertheless she came back to me almost immediately. What decided her to do so I don’t know to this day. But I had every reason to be thankful that she changed her mind, for a more faithful and affectionate servant I never had. We still correspond though she can neither read nor write, and is obliged to dictate her letters to a kindly neighbour.

I knew some wonderfully happy days in that cottage. There were three windows in my little study on the first floor, and from all three the view was superb. Sometimes I was overcome by a feeling of such joy at living in surroundings that were so entirely lovely that I could hardly believe I wasn’t dreaming, that I shouldn’t suddenly awake to reality. I thank God that never once did I fail to realize my own happiness; never for one moment did I take those sun-bathed, silver-blue mountains of Calabria, that lovely sapphire sea for granted; never did I get accustomed to the thrilling and heavenly blue of the sky, to the beauty of that sky seen through branches of orange and lemon trees laden with fruit, to the divine splendour of the stars on soft summer nights, to the mystery of the shimmering, fairy-like road flung

across the sea by the light of the moon, on which it seemed as if one might travel to far-away Africa and the great Sahara Desert.

I hoped to live and die in Sicily at that time. Its beauty stirred me to ecstasy and its remembrance will live for ever in my heart.

There were a good many painters in Taormina, but the one I preferred by far was Mary Wallace. After a visit to her studio, Brangwyn said of her: "She's the best man of the lot."

No doubt she had the talent of a man, but she herself was a true woman—a woman to her finger-tips. She was really gifted, the divine spark was really housed within her delicate body. Her Sicilian pictures are full of beauty and distinction. So are her pictures of Venice. She always painted out of doors, and generally in the early morning. She had studied in Paris.

I remember one picture in particular, an almond tree in full bloom, upon a mountain-side in Taormina, beneath a blue sky of radiant, flawless beauty. There was something of the morning of life in that lovely colouring, something of youth rejoicing innocently in its wonderful gift of beauty, something of youth untainted by the world. When she showed me this picture I said to her: "It is like a cry of joy!"

"And that is how I felt while I was painting it," she said.

I am quite sure that the heart has always played a dominant rôle in the work of those women who have been able to rouse the enthusiasm of their contemporaries. Perhaps had Mary Wallace been dominated less by her great and generous heart she might have produced more pictures, but I am quite sure she would never have produced more beautiful ones.

A good many interesting people visited Taormina while I was living at Casa Felice. Among them I remember the late Lord Burnham, of *Daily Telegraph*

fame, who was there with several members of his family. He was a favourite with every urchin in the place. As he returned from his daily walk he would fling a handful of coppers into the middle of the street, for which there would be an instantaneous scramble, while he stood among the youngsters egging them on and laughing like a boy. I remember how amused I was at his description of a scene that took place between Andrea, the hall-porter of the Timeo, and himself. Lord Burnham was staying at the Castellamare, a beautiful hotel on the way to the station; but his own people and several of his friends were at the Timeo; he had arrived some time after them, and to his great disappointment had not been able to secure a room there. Again and again he had applied for one, only to be told by Andrea that there wasn't one to be had for love or money.

And now he was feeling "out of it," and depressed. Like a good many of us he had a rooted objection to "flocking by himself." But what was to be done? One morning he woke up in a fighting mood. He would attack Andrea once more on the subject; he would give him one more chance of finding him a room, otherwise let him look out for squalls. As everyone knows, Lord Burnham was a tiny little man. Andrea was a tall and powerful one. But Lord Burnham was evidently prepared to go all lengths in order to attain his object—to punch Andrea's head if necessary, even if he had to leap into the air to reach it. In this bellicose frame of mind he marched up to the Timeo, walked resolutely into the bureau, bearded the lion in his den, and delivered his ultimatum.

"Now look here, André" (he pronounced it "Ann Dray"), "it's perfectly useless for you to tell me that you can't put me up, because I've come to tell *you* as *man to man*, that I'm leaving the Castellamare, and coming here *whether you've got a room for me or not!* So now you know what is going to happen."

And "Ann Dray" was so amused at the bare-faced determination of his little lordship to have his own way that somehow he actually *did* manage to squeeze him in somewhere. Heaven alone knows if anyone was evicted for his sake.

When he told us what he had said to Andrea I couldn't help laughing. He looked so pugnacious as—with an evident sense of humour—he repeated the words "AS MAN TO MAN." Everyone was fond of him. I certainly was. You couldn't help it.

Several dear friends of my own came out to Taormina that winter. Mrs. George Holland—Dolores—whom I had known from the time we were both young girls—was one of them. She and her daughter, accompanied by a French maid, spent several weeks at the Timeo and a good many hours at my cottage. Giovannino, always keen on acquiring knowledge, had been studying French in his leisure moments, and, anxious to improve the shining hour, had immediately struck up a friendship with the maid, who told Dolores with considerable amusement of the way he had wished her good night one evening. As he bent politely over her hand he informed her of an event, intimately concerned with himself, which he said was just about to take place, and which, had it really come off, would assuredly have secured him a niche in the Temple of Fame for all time.

"Bonsoir, Mademoiselle," he said; "Maintenant je vais accoucher."

Mrs. Holland's mother was a Peruvian, and a celebrated beauty in her own country, though her maiden name was—to say the least of it—misleading. It was "Espantoso," which may be translated "alarmingly ugly." Nevertheless it was a good old Spanish name which some remote ancestor may have deserved, but which she most certainly did not. She was a delightful woman, but though she lived in England for years and married an Englishman, she was never able to master the language, and made

mistakes which were a never-failing source of delight to her children, who, I am sure, will forgive me for quoting one or two specimens.

Once at a bridge party, when someone complimented her on her clever playing, she said: "No, no, I am not clever—I play entirely by stink." Of course she meant "instinct." She would also refer with enthusiasm to the "cheaps" that were to be picked up at the autumn sales!

Mrs. Holland lost a beloved son in the Great War. She and her daughter nursed the wounded in a Paris hospital during the whole of those terrible years, and now she looks after the interests of many a blinded soldier who has every reason to bless her for her never-failing kindness and sympathy.

It isn't often that one has the chance—in print—of paying a tribute to a dear friend who has never failed one, and though I know that readers, as a rule, only care to hear about "well-known people," I am afraid they will find a good many quite unknown ones in this volume of memoirs, for no other reason than that I have cared for them, and that they have cared for me and been wonderfully good to me.

That spring the Hollands and I went for a few days to Syracuse, accompanied by a French friend of theirs—Monsieur Armand Poisson, who in his boyhood was a ward of the Duc d'Aumale, and in his youth served as an officer in the French Army. I liked him very much, for he was one of the kindest and most considerate of men, and never did anyone stand chaff more good-naturedly.

"Voilà encore une tuile qui me tombe sur la tête," he would say, when he was accused of some quite imaginary offence.

We stayed at the delightful Villa Politi, which is situated in the immediate neighbourhood of the celebrated stone-quarries where thousands of Athenian soldiers were confined after the defeat of the army sent from Athens to besiege Syracuse in the year 450 B.C.

I can't remember whether it was in the Syracuse Museum or on my first and only visit to Athens that I first saw the lovely little Tanagra figures of women and girls, so celebrated for their exquisite and fragile beauty, but I remember the figures themselves perfectly, and recollect how I longed to possess one of them. We made several interesting excursions; the two I remember best were to the wonderful ruins of the old Greek fortress, and the equally wonderful ruins of the Greek Theatre, where old Greek plays were given one year while I was living in Taormina; but I was strongly advised to remain away on account of the enormous crowds that flocked to see them, and which made it really dangerous for anyone whose limbs were anything but reliable. I was very much disappointed at missing these plays, which were seen by most of my friends.

During that visit we went for a row on the Anapo river, where the papyrus still grows. I picked some of it, took it home and planted it in my garden. I also recollect a tea to which we invited a young midshipman, a nephew of Lady Oxford's, who was on board one of the men-of-war lying in the bay. I had met him the previous summer at his mother's house in Scotland (he was a son of Mr. Frank Tennant), and knowing that he was to be in Sicily the following winter, had asked him to come over to Taormina if he could obtain leave to do so. But there hadn't been time for that, so we arranged to meet at Syracuse, where he had tea with us at the Villa Politi. I remember with real pleasure the delightful impression made upon our French friend by this boy's attractive personality. I had ordered all sorts of cakes and jams, so that he might have a real "tuck-in" to remind him of the delicious teas of his own Scotch home, and several times during the meal I noticed the kindly expression in Monsieur Armand's face as he watched him enjoying the good things that had been provided. Once or twice he said to me: "Comme

ils sont charmants, ces petits aspirants Anglais." I think it was the simplicity and absolute naturalness of the boy that won his heart, as indeed it had won my own.

It was Mrs. Holland's daughter, Nini, who accidentally cleared up the mystery that none of us had been able to solve at Maniace, when I was so terrified one night by hearing groans in my room. She was telling me of a similar experience of her own while staying with friends at an old château in Brittany. Towards the end of her story she said: "You can imagine my relief when after a very unpleasant night I was told next day that there was an owl's nest close to one of the windows of my room, and that the owls were responsible for the horrible groans that had given me such a fright." I then realized that the groans I had heard at Maniace were in all probability due to the same cause, for my bed also happened to be quite close to a window, and the noises I had heard were exactly like those she described.

Lady Dawkins was another friend who spent the spring of 1908 in Taormina. It was not long after she lost her brilliantly clever husband, Clinton Dawkins, and her dear, kind old father, Mr. Johnstone, who was one of the Governors of the Bank of England. She was in very indifferent health owing to all the sorrow and trouble she had been through, and it was her old and devoted friend, Lord Milner, who advised her to go to Taormina. I had met him once or twice at her house, and he knew that I was living there. He also knew how fond I was of her. But I was fond of the whole family. They had all in turn been true friends to me, and I can never forget their kindness during one of my bad illnesses in Broadway, when dear Poppy Johnstone (the present Mrs. James Annesley) and her sister Kati were the first to come to me. And afterwards, when I had to go to London to see a great heart specialist, it was Lady Dawkins who put me up at her house, as it was not

considered safe for me to go to an hotel by myself. I was really hanging on to life by a thread, and they wouldn't leave me to the care of strangers. I had been touched to the heart by the kindness of all three sisters, and was only too glad to think that in my turn I might be of some little use to one of them. And I secured rooms at the Timeo for Lady Dawkins and her daughter, confident that the beauty in which she would live for the next few weeks, and the lovely climate, would work wonders. And so they did. There were a great many unusually pleasant people staying at the Timeo just then, and they also helped to turn her thoughts in a happier direction.

I often went up to the Timeo to be with her, and she often came down to my cottage. And one day, while we were sitting in the garden, she told me how much better she felt, and how much more able to face life again.

My sister, Annie Compton, and her husband were also staying at the Timeo that spring. Annie's outlook on life was so refreshingly and amusingly unconventional that Lady Dawkins took a fancy to her from the moment I introduced them to each other. How unconventional she was can best be suggested by a little scene that took place at an extremely smart party at a beautiful house at the corner of Grosvenor Square where we were both present. She had just arrived from Chile with her two little boys, and was quite young and very pretty. Signor Tosti happened to be singing at this party, and Annie and I were sitting close to the piano. Everyone was listening with rapt attention to the extremely passionate love-song he was singing, when suddenly he veered round upon the piano stool, looked me straight in the face, and never took his eyes off me till he had finished. And there I sat squirming and writhing under a perfect hail of "T'adoro! Fuggiam! Fuggiam! Vieni! Vieni!" (or their equivalent), till I felt so uncomfortable that the only wonder is I didn't dive

under the piano. My sister was so amused to see me the object of this sudden and to her (and, I must say, also to me) quite incomprehensible and unexpected attention, that she began to laugh. "No gentlemanly instinct prompted the avoidance of the roar." (I quote a sentence from Robert Hichens' amusing short story, *The Lift*). And everyone began to look at her with amazement, while I felt that if he didn't leave off singing at me, and if she didn't leave off laughing, I should really have to take to my heels! But even after he *had* stopped, and our hostess had hurried up to him, and engaged him in conversation in an almost hysterical endeavour to divert his attention from what was going on under his very nose, she went steadily on; the tears were running down her face as she sat there, blissfully unconscious of the scandal she was creating, for she was extremely short-sighted.

And then I realized that unless Signor Tosti evaporated into thin air, she would *never* leave off, for every time she raised her head and caught sight of him, it started her off again. Mercifully, there is an end to all things, and our poor hostess must have been thankful when we wished her good night. I don't know whether that good night was accompanied by the usual formula, "I'm afraid we really *must* go," but if it was, even the least imaginative will understand why we were not asked to reconsider our decision.

That spring was the happiest I ever spent at Taormina. I loved having my sister there. She was the first of my people to visit me. A more loving elder sister never lived. Although she had six children of her own, she kept the same warm place in her heart for Emmie and myself; we were often separated for years, and by a distance of eight thousand miles, yet nothing lessened her abiding affection for us.

I think it was in the summer of 1907 that I had

my first glimpse of country life in Calabria. The house to which I was invited with my friend, Miss Marie Mellien, had originally belonged to King Ferdinand, and was magnificently situated several thousand feet above the sea, in the very heart of great mountains covered with glorious forests; nowhere have I seen more splendid, more gigantic trees. The scenery in every direction was wild and romantic to the last degree, and although the heat at Catanzaro, the little station on the coast, was almost unbearable, it was beautifully cool at Ferdinandeia. After a drive of three hours and a half in a Fiat motor we had exchanged orange and lemon groves, fig trees and Japanese medlars, oleander and poinsettia bushes, for the trees of the North—pines, firs, oaks and beeches. The change of temperature was extraordinary and more than welcome. That summer I actually saw a young wolf in one of the forests; it was running quite quietly in front of our motor-car.

Ferdinandeia was a great straggling building, surrounded by many others, where Signor Fazzari lived with his family and with the families of all the people he employed on his vast estate. Sometimes they would be snowbound for months during the winter, but luckily all the necessary food was procurable from the farms by which the house was surrounded. And they were not the only people to profit by this fortunate circumstance. Mussolino, one of the most celebrated brigands of latter times, whose fame is almost legendary in Sicily and Calabria, was for some time in hiding close to Ferdinandeia, but old Fazzari never gave him away, nor did anyone else, and he was always given food when he asked for it. The man's history was a tragic one. He had been accused of a terrible crime, of which he was entirely innocent, and had been condemned to many years' imprisonment. One day he managed to escape; blind with rage he returned to his village and killed all those

who had borne false witness against him, after which he fled to the mountains where he hid successfully for years before he was finally captured.

Signor Fazzari had served under Garibaldi, and I hadn't been in the house for more than a minute when he presented me with a copy of G. M. Trevelyan's interesting book, *Garibaldi and the Thousand*. As a matter of fact, he had it in his hand when he welcomed us in the hall. He had a very kind heart under rather a rough exterior, and personally I found him *simpatico*, for he had a real sense of humour, which, as far as my experience goes, can't be said of most Italians. His son, who was equally kind, but far more a man of the world, told me the following story about his father and Pope Pius X which was, I thought, very much to the credit of the honest old soldier, and very characteristic of the lovable old Pope.

On one occasion when a certain Cardinal was visiting at their house, they had shown him an eighth-century New Testament in the possession of the family, so valuable that the Cardinal (who, I believe, had gone to Ferdinanda on purpose to see it) remarked that such a treasure ought really to be in the Vatican Library, where it would be far safer than in those mountain wilds. To his profound astonishment the old man said: "You can take it away with you if you like. I have no particular use for it; the Pope is quite welcome to it. It means nothing to me!"

The Cardinal took it to Rome and handed it over to Pius X, who said he couldn't possibly accept a gift of such immense value without thanking the donor personally. "As I cannot go to him," he said to the Cardinal, "do you think you could persuade him to come here and see me?"

When Signor Fazzari received the letter conveying this message, he wrote in reply: "I don't mind going so long as you tell the Pope that I'm an old Garibaldista, and have no religious beliefs. I'm not going under any false pretences."

When this message was given to the Holy Father, he renewed his invitation, and added the following words: "There was many a gallant gentleman in Garibaldi's army."

Old Ercole Fazzari was so bowled over when this was repeated to him, that he at once wrote to the Cardinal and said he would go to Rome with his son if a time for an audience could be arranged. It was this same son who said to me: "We were very much interested in all we saw; the Vatican itself, the Swiss Guards in their medieval uniforms, in fact all the Pope's surroundings are so extraordinarily impressive; but when he himself entered the room in which we were waiting to see him . . ." Here he paused and smiled, and there was a really charming expression in his face as he said the next moment: "S'apri la porta e entro—un prete."

I have never met anyone who knew this saintly old man who was not irresistibly attracted by the touching simplicity that was one of his special and most lovable characteristics.

But what else was to be expected of a Cardinal who, when he was summoned to Rome for the election of the new Pope, left Venice with nothing but a few hundred lire in his pocket? And those he had been obliged to borrow, as he was so poor!

Shortly before returning to Italy in the winter of 1908 I received an invitation from Lady Hulse (Lord Burnham's married daughter) to spend a week-end at Hall Barn, her father's place at Beaconsfield. I accepted with real pleasure, and thoroughly enjoyed the visit. Several interesting people were staying there, among others T. P. O'Connor, Mr. McKenna and Count Metternich, the German Ambassador. But there were also a good many other visitors, and I have never forgotten the amusing and good-looking Irishman who took me in to dinner, and who made me laugh as one doesn't often laugh at a dinner-party. I haven't forgotten his name, but as I'm

going to repeat something he told me I won't mention it. I can't imagine how it was that we got on to the subject of proposals of marriage, but when he told me how he had proposed—or, to be strictly accurate, how he had *not* proposed—to his own very pretty wife, I must say I was more than a little amused. I don't know when or where he fell in love with her, but when at last he screwed up his courage to find out whether his feelings were reciprocated, they were both staying at a famous German watering-place, where opportunities for love declarations were certainly not lacking. One evening, after dinner, he made up his mind to follow her into the garden of the hotel. The propitious moment had arrived. Of course she knew quite well that he was head over ears in love with her, although she must have been surprised at his prolonged silence. But she must have been far more surprised when he finally broke it, for beneath the light of a moon that would have inspired an anæmic codfish, he stammered and stuttered to such an extent that at last he exclaimed in despair: "It's all no use, Miss —, I must wait till to-morrow morning. I—I must speak to you on an empty stomach!"

Where proposals are concerned some people really have all the luck! Another friend of mine, a beautiful American girl, had a still funnier proposal from a gentleman hailing from the Far West. When she refused him, he said: "Now, Miss —, it's *just* as easy to say 'Yes' as to say 'No.' Why ever can't you say 'Yes,' when I love you just as hard as a mule can kick?"

"And how hard is that?" said my friend.

"Waal," he answered, "just you get behind that mule, and I guess you'll soon find out."

Towards the end of dinner Count Metternich leant across the table and said to me: "I hear you are going to Taormina. I also intend going there very

MY INDIAN SUMMER

soon. I wonder whether you would be so kind as to ask the proprietor of the Hôtel Timeo to retain a room for me."

I said I would do so with pleasure.

But no visitors came to Taormina that winter.

CHAPTER TWELVE

So much has been written about the terrific earthquake of Messina that I feel it is perfectly useless for me to recapitulate the dreadful facts that are already known the whole world over. Still, I suppose the actual experiences of anyone who was in Sicily at that time may be of some interest, and it is to those events in which my own friends, and I personally, took part, that I shall chiefly allude.

I passed through the ill-fated town only four days before it was destroyed. I was returning from England to spend Christmas at my cottage in Taormina, which is about one hour by rail from Messina. The town, seen from the deck of the ferry-boat in which one crosses from Villa San-Giovanni to the island, always made a delightful impression upon me; it looked so gay, so animated, as one caught glimpses of it through the arcades that occurred at intervals in the Via Garibaldi, the long street parallel with the Marina. It was so beautifully situated with its background of blue mountains, dotted with pink and white villas, which peeped out from orange and lemon trees, and from whose sunny terraces one looked across the Straits to the glittering snow-covered mountains of Calabria; there was something so joyous, so radiant in the whole atmosphere, that to connect it with anything in the nature of so ghastly a catastrophe seemed quite impossible, notwithstanding the fact that the town had already been destroyed by earthquake on more than one occasion, though never to such an extent.

The beautiful façade of the Cathedral still stood grandly erect in the Piazza del Duomo, where it had

looked down upon generation after generation from the time of the great Roger. A splendid memorial of the past, it seemed absolutely indestructible.

Yet for days and days before this most frightful calamity there had been a sinister apparition among the gay crowds that thronged the streets, and who towards evening strolled beneath the palm trees of the Piazza del Municipio, talking and laughing to the sound of the military band that played there every night. I don't know whether the strange, fanatical creature who originally came from Mola, the little white village above Taormina, had ever preached in the streets of Messina during the years that preceded the earthquake, but two or three months before it actually occurred, he tramped through the town crying: "Messina is threatened with destruction, you are all doomed to death. Repent of your sins."

The people only laughed at him; they called him *il pazzo*.¹ That the man suffered from religious monomania was evident. Still, there was something uncanny in his frantic warnings coinciding with the earthquake, and I have sometimes wondered whether, leaving his undoubted fanaticism on one side, he may not have been endowed with that strangest of gifts—second sight—at all events on that occasion.

The earthquake occurred at twenty minutes past five on Monday morning, the 28th of December, 1908. It was still quite dark. I awoke about a minute or two before it happened and was lying quietly in bed, thinking how pleasant it was to be at home again, surrounded by my own belongings, when I was startled by the dreadful shock and the noise that accompanied it. I was terrified, for I was alone upstairs, the only other person in the house being Giovannino, my faithful Sicilian servant—my cook, Catina, always slept at her own little house in Taormina. Giovannino slept in a room on the ground floor opening into the garden. He could, of course,

¹ The lunatic.

have escaped in one second; but that is not the way of your Sicilian servant, even if he has only cared for you for a month or two. The house was shaking as if it were coming down when he heard me cry: "Giovannino! Giovannino!"

The next second I heard him shout, "Vengo, Signora, vengo," as he rushed upstairs to my rescue. Together we scrambled down the narrow spiral staircase that led to the ground floor, and hurriedly unlocked a small door that opened on to the terrace, where we waited nervously to see whether there would be another shock. It seems that they went on all day at Messina, but I can't say I felt another for some days. The earthquake was felt to a far greater extent in some parts of Taormina than in others, but no harm was done to my cottage; one or two ceilings were cracked, but that was all. Considering its severity, it was quite extraordinary how little harm was done in Taormina. Two or three old cottages and a very old house belonging to the White Nuns were rendered uninhabitable, but they were, anyhow, in a very tumble-down condition.

We remained downstairs till it was daylight, occasionally going on to the terrace. It was quite fine, though rather cold, and the sea was perfectly calm. I remember being astonished at this, especially when I heard afterwards what had actually happened. In the admirable account of the earthquake in Mr. Spencer Musson's book on Sicily, one of the best I have ever read about that country, he says: "The centre of disturbance was in the Straits, and the upheaval of the sea-bottom sent a huge wave inland which, as it swung back, sucked everything movable with it."

As we sat in the kitchen by the open door, too frightened to go back to bed, something occurred which I shall remember to my dying day. My cottage was in the country, close to Taormina, but too far away to hear anything that was going on there.

MY INDIAN SUMMER

I was told afterwards that the poor people had rushed into the streets shrieking with terror. But the only sound I heard that morning about half an hour after the shock was the bell of San Pancrazio, the picturesque old church built upon the foundation-stones of a Greek temple. It is said that San Pancrazio, "who had seen Christ in the flesh," was one of the two bishops sent by St. Peter to bring Christianity to Sicily. He is the patron saint of Taormina, and many a time have I heard his intercession invoked after Benediction when priest and people join together in the prayer (which they say in the Sicilian dialect):



His statue is kept in the church dedicated to him, though it is seldom that Mass is said there. I shall never forget as I sat shivering with cold and fright in the kitchen—where Giovannino was boiling water in order to give me a cup of tea—the extraordinarily soothing effect of that bell from the moment it began to ring. It seemed to speak of a world of peace that could never be destroyed, that existed somewhere for our eternal comfort and consolation, and towards which we might turn our thoughts even in the midst of the dreadful sufferings we are sometimes called upon to go through on this earth.

¹ "Let us pray with fervour to San Pancrazio, our protector."

As I listened to it ringing so steadily in the dark among the mountains, I realized the presence of God as I had hardly ever realized it before. I can't explain the strange and immediate cessation of fear; I can only record it.

My friend, Sir Alex. Hood, came down to see me a little later that morning; he told me that the people of Taormina had gone *en masse* to the church of San Pancrazio and had carried the statue of their patron saint to the Duomo which stands at the far end of the town, and where, not three-quarters of an hour after the earthquake, a great public thanksgiving had been offered up. Their beloved saint had watched over their little town, and they wished to honour him and return thanks to Almighty God who had invested him with such wonderful power. Sir Alex. told me he had never seen anything more touching or more picturesque than the procession as it passed by in the early dawn: the statue of San Pancrazio was borne by several men and could be seen far above the heads of the crowd; the women who had hurriedly thrown their orange and lemon handkerchiefs over their heads lent a touch of colour to the scene; while the musicians of the town band who are invariably called upon to play on all solemn or joyous occasions, had immediately responded, and had marched at the head of the long string of people, playing their various instruments.

I know, perhaps as well as any foreign woman can ever know, the faults and failings of the poor people of Taormina, for I have lived among them for years, but that morning they certainly gave proof of a touching and beautiful virtue. Their lovely little town and they themselves had been preserved from a terrible fate, and their first thought was to give thanks to Almighty God for their safety. I wonder how many of us who think ourselves so vastly superior to them, would have acted with such instantaneous gratitude? Their second thought, I am bound to

say, was to make as much noise as possible, and that same morning, towards midday, boys and girls went round collecting money for the fireworks that were to be let off next day. There were to be general rejoicings. Now a *fiesta* in Sicily is not a *fiesta* worth mentioning unless it is absolutely ear-splitting, so we all knew what we were letting ourselves in for when we gave our subscriptions. Everyone was in good spirits. Taormina looked as lovely as ever, and had given one more proof that as far as earthquakes were concerned, she was able to resist them with complete success.

I lunched that same day with Sir Alex. Hood, at the Hôtel Timeo. The weather was radiantly lovely, and as we sat on the terrace, sipping our coffee, and looking out over the view which, seen from there, is surely one of the loveliest in the world, we hardly even referred to the events of the night. One of the waiters, a man called Pancrazio, whom I have known and liked for years, said to me: "Veda, Signorina, fino a Dio vuole un tal gran bene a Taormina, che assolutamente non ha permesso che ci accadesse nessuna disgrazia."¹

Alas, there was no *fiesta*. When the first rumour of the destruction of Messina reached us—how, I do not know—it was treated as an absurdity. But late that night a poor Taorminese boy, called Giuseppe Lo Giudice, a friend of Carmelo Longo, the servant of Robert Hichens, limped into the village in an almost dying condition and announced the 'dreadful news. He was lying ill in the Military Hospital in Messina, but managed to crawl out from among the débris into the open air, and his first thought was to get home as quickly as possible. Poor boy, he died that spring, and only exchanged one hospital for another; but notwithstanding his exhausted condition, he

¹ "You see, Signorina, even Almighty God is so fond of Taormina that He absolutely would not allow any disaster to overtake her."

actually managed to walk the twenty miles or so that separate Messina from Taormina. Everyone thought he was exaggerating grossly, but when the news was corroborated the next day there was a frantic rush into the town. Most of the Taorminese had friends and relations there. The journey, which generally only lasts one hour, on this occasion lasted three. My servant Giovannino was among those who went in search of friends. He told me that the train was so crowded that even the roofs of the carriages were black with people. When they arrived at Messina, they found the platform strewn with mattresses that had hurriedly been dragged out of the neighbouring ruins; on them wounded and dying people were lying, waiting to be transported to the hospitals of Catania and Siracusa. The sights in the ruined streets were appalling—dead bodies were hanging out of windows, and at every moment one stumbled over a leg, an arm, and sometimes the head of some poor creature who had been literally smashed to pieces by the falling masonry.

The most frightful sight of all was an immense heap of limbs, trunks of bodies, and heads, which they had not yet had time to remove, but which were afterwards buried at a place called Mare Grosso, near the Citadella.

In the Square of San Martino the Red Cross Society had organized a temporary hospital, and dreadful but most necessary operations were constantly being performed there. The wounded were being carried in all day long by the Russian sailors, who were the first to come to the rescue. They behaved splendidly, and to this day are remembered with passionate gratitude and enthusiasm. Some years ago, when a Russian man-of-war visited Messina, the officers and men received a perfect ovation. The mere fact that they were Russians was enough.

Hundreds of Sicilians owe their lives to the

indomitable pluck of these brave men. It was said of them: "They have the souls of heroes in the bodies of monkeys"—to such dangerous and apparently inaccessible heights did they climb when it was a case of rescuing anyone. Splendid work was also done by the English sailors, but they had to come all the way from Siracusa, whereas the Russian men-of-war (three, I believe) were lying in the harbour and were able to give immediate help. Personally I could not help feeling glad that the Russians had this chance of distinguishing themselves. After their cruel reverses in the war with Japan, it seemed only fair that they should be given the opportunity of showing the metal they were made of.

The Italian troops were, of course, on the spot from the very beginning, and when one remembers that over twenty-five thousand people perished in five minutes, that thousands of people had to be dragged from the ruins of houses, churches, public buildings, hotels, hospitals, etc., the magnitude of their task can be imagined. They and the firemen did wonders, and Giovannino saw them save a little child's life under peculiarly touching circumstances. This poor little boy (he was only four years old) was rescued on Wednesday afternoon, the 30th of December, at three o'clock, from the ruins of an immense house which everyone supposed to be absolutely empty. The only part of the house that had not fallen to pieces was a tiny portion of a room on one of the top stories, whose floor consisted chiefly of a few shattered planks of wood. A corner of the bed was visible from the street. It was impossible to imagine that any living human being could be lying in it, but the incredible sometimes happens, and the terrified child had lain there from the moment of the catastrophe: that is to say, for two days and nights, without food, without help, without anyone to whisper a word of comfort or hope to him. It was towards three o'clock on that Wednesday afternoon that someone heard his

cries; yet how often before must he have cried in vain, and how often his cries must have been drowned in the uproar going on all round him! The news of these cries spread like wildfire. An immense crowd gathered round the ruined house, and some *bersaglieri* and firemen came rushing to the spot with ropes. A ladder was carefully placed against the wall. How the fireman managed to reach the poor child whom he eventually rescued from a horrible death, was a veritable miracle of courage and devotion; and when after an interval of agonizing suspense he reappeared with the little fellow clinging round his neck, the excitement of the people rose to fever heat. As he put his foot upon the first step of the ladder that was propped up against a wall only too likely to collapse, hundreds of people fell on their knees imploring God Almighty and the Madonna to protect them both, and when at last he reached the ground with his little burden, both men and women were in tears. Giovannino saw a woman run up to the child with an orange; his little lips were cracked and dry; he was parched with thirst.

The next day I received a father and son into my cottage. The man was a porter at the Messina railway station. His name was Salvatore Buoncuore, and he was very well known to most of the English residents in Taormina, for he used to look specially after us on our arrival from, and departure to, the Continent. Almost all the refugees had to be clothed from head to foot. Owing to the early hour of the earthquake no one was dressed, and many had fled from the crumbling houses with nothing but a blanket or a sheet wrapped round them. By the time they drifted into Taormina they had been provided—goodness only knows by whom—with garments of a sort, and sometimes, in spite of everything, one could hardly help laughing at the extraordinary apparitions. I remember one poor man of extremely generous proportions who, when he arrived, was offered I don't know how

many pairs of trousers, none of which fitted him. A distribution of clothes was going on at the Workmen's Club, at which he turned up, and at which I was present. Every now and again someone would hand him yet another pair, with some such encouraging words as these: "Ecco! Un po' di coraggio! This pair I am sure will fit you splendidly! Get behind the screen and try them on."

He tried them on, but always with the same pitiful result.

Finally he was handed a colossal pair; he retired for a few moments, put them on, and presently emerged with a look of absolute despair on his poor fat face. He made straight for me. He knew instinctively that he might count on my sympathy! And certainly a fellow-feeling makes one wondrous kind. How often have I not tried to buy some garment "off the peg" and been told after innumerable struggles: "I am afraid, Madam, we have nothing *approaching* your size."

He stood for a moment in front of me, and then gave vent to his feelings.

"Look at them, Signorina," he cried, pointing to the trousers, "and tell the truth. Look at them, and tell me if *you* think they are a beautiful fit!"

Indeed I didn't. They didn't meet round his waist by nearly a quarter of a yard! In fact, to put it mildly, they only reached the *snow-line* of his anatomy, and by no means soared to those giddy altitudes to which self-respecting trousers are supposed not only to aspire, but to triumphantly reach! And the waistcoat was worse still! The poor man was on the verge of tears.

"What shall I do, Dio benedetto? What shall I do? This waistcoat they also tell me fits most perfectly."

But it didn't! There was a dreadful misunderstanding between the buttons and the buttonholes;

they refused point-blank to come together; the human bow-window across which they glared at each other separated them as irrevocably as a decree *nisi* separates a divorced couple.

At last I had an inspiration.

"Wear your old suit just a few days longer," I said, "and I'll give you a coupon to go to the tailor here and order yourself a new one. After all, everyone knows why you are in this sad condition—there is nothing to be ashamed of."

He was so overjoyed, poor fellow, and so grateful, that I could have wept over him. He was a perfectly respectable man, the owner of a nice little wine-shop. No one is more particular about his appearance than the Italian of the shopkeeper class.

I am thankful to say I had plenty of money to distribute owing to the splendid way my friends responded to my appeals for help. A very dear friend who, alas, died that same spring, Mrs. Albert Vickers, sent me £50 by return of post; the late Lord Burnham and Sir Edgar Speyer sent me £70 between them; the late Miss Alice Goetz sent me £10; Robert Hichens handed me over £20 that had been sent to him by the late Duchess of Manchester; and owing to the kindness of Lady Dawkins and the late Mr. William Koch, I received two donations from the Lord Mayor's fund—one amounting to £200, the other to £250. Later on the American delegate gave me another £200. But what touched me more than I can say was this: the clerks at Messrs. Coutts's Bank collected £10 among them, and sent it to me. Considering that for years and years I have been a perfect nuisance to everyone personally known to me at No. 440 Strand, rushing in continually to know whether my balance amounted to one and sixpence halfpenny, or whether (which was much more likely) I had overdrawn it by £50, it is a wonder they didn't all tear their hair on hearing that I was still alive, instead of being so kind and sympathetic.

Talking of "being alive" reminds me of a conversation I heard some years afterwards.

"Newspapers aren't very reliable," said one man. "There was a report in one of them that X had been swallowed up in the great Messina earthquake."

"The earth must have returned X pretty quickly, for we met the next day," said another, laughing.

An American who had been listening to the conversation and with whom X was anything but a favourite, said dryly: "I guess the earth knew its business."

Altogether what with private subscriptions that continued to pour in, the money I received amounted to a good deal over a thousand pounds.

But "*l'Affaire* Coat and Trousers" was at the very beginning, when I had very little at my disposal.

The members of the foreign colony were untiring in their efforts to relieve the general distress. Many personal friends of my own were among them, and men and women went down every day in relays to the station to meet the incoming trains in order to distribute food to the destitute crowds who were being taken to the hospitals of Catania and Siracusa. Signor Floresta, the popular owner of the Hôtel Timeo, sent down two hundred quarts of hot soup daily, and the English committee gave bread, milk, biscuits, fruit, chocolate and cigarettes. How these last were appreciated by many a poor fellow can hardly be imagined. The scenes on the trains were frightful. People died, and children were born there, among indescribable horrors.

One of the "White Nuns," a young and pretty Englishwoman, and a personal friend of mine, walked in company with another nun, a Frenchwoman, all the way to Messina to find out what had become of the nuns belonging to their Order who were living in the town. To their inexpressible relief, they returned with every member of the community, including all

the children who were being educated by them, after which they began their beautiful work of mercy at the Taormina Hospital.

I remember one little boy about seven years old whom I was asked to provide with clothes. He was the son of a college friend of Dr. Salvatore Cacciola, who was also English Consul, and had been brought to the hospital with his little brother and sister who had both been badly hurt. He himself had escaped untouched. He was a dear little fellow. After I had rigged him out in a pretty sailor suit, I said to him: "Now is there anything else you want?"

"Yes," he said, "just one thing more."

I thought I had forgotten something connected with his little outfit, and said: "Well, what is it?"

"I want a gun. I've seen one in a shop—it costs two lire."

Poor little chap! At the risk of scandalizing everyone who subscribed to the Lord Mayor's fund, I must confess that I bought that gun and made the child so happy that he forgot for a little while that he didn't even know whether his parents were dead or alive. Both, thank God, were alive, and had been taken, badly wounded, to the Palermo Hospital, but we only heard this after three or four weeks.

One of the saddest cases was that of a poor man whom I met one dark evening, as I was shopping in the Corso. The woman who was serving me drew my attention to him. On seeing me he had entered the shop, half shyly; he was looking longingly at some warm overcoats, which had just been sent from Catania, but he didn't speak to me. The shopwoman evidently knew all about him and liked him. I spoke to him, and then he told me what he had gone through. He had lost his wife and his only little daughter on the fatal morning, but under peculiarly horrible circumstances. He had escaped scot free, but they had both been buried beneath the ruins, and alas, were not killed outright. He heard them screaming for

help, but could not get near them; it was absolutely impossible to drag them out from the masonry that was slowly crushing them to death. He adored his child and worked like a madman to save her, but all his efforts were useless. Indeed, they were both beyond human help. The cries grew fainter and fainter, and at last ceased.

As he came to the end of the story he gave a cry of such terrible despair, that it was almost more than one could bear. I only pray I may never hear such another as long as I live.

His story was but one of many thousand similar ones. Giovannino knew his little girl. She was only twelve years old.

“Era proprio bellina,” he said.

The poor fellow was shivering with cold. I gave him one of the warm overcoats there and then—he never asked me for anything else, indeed I never saw him again. But I have never forgotten him.

One poor woman in the hospital at Taormina had lost her parents, her husband, *all* her children and all her sisters and brothers, except one, and he was killed a few days later by some falling masonry while in Messina, where he had gone to try and save some of his belongings.

For weeks free meals were given at Taormina, and clothes and money were distributed. I don't think anything was left undone that *could* be done for the poor stricken people.

Robert Hichens happened to be in Naples on the day of the earthquake, but returned at once to Taormina when the news of the disaster reached him. It was impossible to travel there by train, and he crossed to Palermo by the first available steamer. The train for Taormina was so crowded that he had to stand up during the whole journey—a matter of about eight hours. I remember an incident in connection with his arrival that touched me very much.

Andrea, the burly porter of the Hôtel Timeo, who was responsible for the box in which the subscriptions of the visitors were collected, called out to me, as I went past his little office:

“Sa Lei che e arrivato il Signor Inchinsi?”
(That was his way of pronouncing “Hichens.”)

“Oh, yes,” I answered. “I had a note from him last night and I am lunching with him to-day at the hotel.”

“Ah, Signorina,” he said, excitedly, “Lei ha una perla d’amico.”¹

“Yes,” I said. “I’ve known that for many a long year.”

Something had happened that had evidently touched Andrea a good deal. The tears were very close to everyone’s eyes during those first days, and that morning neither Andrea nor I were any exception to the rule.

I still possess the books in which I kept the record of the money given to me for the victims of the earthquake. A great deal of it was spent in excavating and burying the dead, in helping people to discover their belongings, in tickets to and from Messina for that purpose; above all, in providing them with clothes, in buying various tools for the men and sewing-machines for the women, in setting others up in various little businesses. Sometimes they would start a tiny shop on a capital of one or two hundred francs.² Their pluck and patience were heroic. I hardly ever heard anyone complain from the first moment they were able to help themselves. A very large proportion of the money given to me was spent in mattresses, blankets and pillows—sheets I only provided towards the end. In order to distribute the money as advantageously as possible, I had most of the boots that were given away made by refugee bootmakers; and as often as possible I had clothes

¹ “Ah, Signorina, you have a jewel of a friend.”

² Two hundred francs at that time were worth £8.

made by refugee workwomen. At the beginning, however, I employed a kind and pretty Taorminese woman of whom I have always been extremely fond, called Maria Santa, who worked for half prices for many of these poor people with real devotion and kindness. But at last there were so many refugees in Taormina that it was almost impossible to shelter them, and I was strongly advised to offer each person who would consent to go to one of the larger towns an extra sum of twenty-five francs. In this way we got rid of a great many people.

A really comical scene took place at my cottage one morning, where sometimes I didn't even get the chance of putting on anything more elaborate than a dressing-gown till midday, so early did the people come down to ask for help; one had to go as carefully as possible into each case, though often it was absolutely impossible to do so, people would have starved while one made the necessary inquiries. One had to act, and act quickly. This time a man was shown into my study who rejoiced in the cheerful name of Fortunato Spinelli. I must say his name was a good deal more fortunate than his appearance! He was an ugly, uninteresting little man of the *basso popolo*, rather like a weasel. While I was talking to him I heard the most piercing shrieks downstairs. At last we could hardly hear ourselves speak, and I went into the hall and said impatiently: "Who on earth is making that appalling noise?"

One of the servants appeared with an extremely ugly and slatternly woman in tow.

"Ecco, Signorina, here is the one who screams. She thinks you intend to separate her from her beloved—she says you shall not do so."

"Good heavens!" I said. "I never even knew she existed."

I then told this Sicilian edition of Mrs. Micawber to come up to the study, where I proceeded to interview her, as well as the object of her infatuation. I

thought to myself: "Evidently this is a squalid repetition of 'Romeo and Juliet'; they are an unsavoury couple, but if they adore each other, well then, in the name of all that is indecorous, let me at all events give them a chance of sticking to each other!" So I gave them coupons with which to get clothes and boots, a little money for immediate necessities, and twenty-five francs each to take themselves off to Naples. Just as they were about to leave, it occurred to me to ask how long they had worshipped at each other's shrine.

"Since yesterday!" said the woman unblushingly.

I really gasped. Then I said: "And what is your name?"

She answered: "My name is Spurio."

"Well," I thought, "add a *u* and an *s* to the name and it will certainly fit in most beautifully with the situation!" What a couple! They were veritable emblems of fraud! They were both swathed in "false flannel" (the Sicilian name for flannelette), they certainly had made a *faux pas*, and to crown it all, the lady's very name was "Spurio."

I heard afterwards that the wretches had immediately sold the boots with which I had provided them, in order, I suppose, that their bare feet might awaken the pity of some other member of the Relief Committee, on whom they would presently play the same trick.

And as Giovannino said on another occasion (he had and still has a monomania for explaining everything): "Queste sono le piccole fenomene della Sicilia."

On another occasion I received letter after letter warning me against an unfortunate individual, who, I was told, would most certainly call upon me for help. One person wrote: "Do not allow him to exploit you—he is a rank impostor, and has already

applied half a dozen times to every Relief Committee in the place. He has clothes enough for the rest of his natural life."

A Russian wrote (in German): "He says he is a Marchese, but don't believe him. *Er ist ein wahrer Prahlhans!* (whatever that may be). Don't be taken in by him; don't give him a thing."

Another lady rushed at full speed down the slippery goat-path that led to my cottage, at the risk of breaking every bone in her body, in order to be in time to put me on my guard. She announced that this *Prahlhans* was rolling in riches (more or less), owing to the fact that he had been the round of Taormina and had received at least a dozen splendid outfits. To give him even a safety-pin would be a lamentable miscarriage of justice.

The result of all these warnings was that I longed to see the miscreant, and to judge for myself whether the devil was as black as he was painted. And when one day I was told that the Marchese —— wished to speak to me, I was quite excited.

I went downstairs and found the seediest-looking individual I have ever seen in my life, seated dejectedly on the sofa. After a conversation of a few minutes, he said: "It is true, indeed, that I have gone to everyone for help, but what has been the result, my good Signora? Several old hats and a feather boa!"

The suit he had on was only fit for the rag-bag, but if, after discarding it, he had nothing to fall back upon but a choice of moth-eaten hats and a feather boa, he was indeed in a cruel predicament. To burst upon the piazza in this strange attire, like a living but incorrect replica of the Apollo Belvedere, was more than even Taormina was likely to put up with, though it may, with a good deal of truth, be called the home of unconventionality. I realized this, and after I had provided the poor wretch with a change of linen and a decent suit of clothes, he

asked for nothing more. On the contrary, he sent me some vases that had been dug up out of his garden, and afterwards, when he heard that I was ill, he wrote me the queerest letter I have ever had in my life—it rather frightened me. “I will cure you,” he wrote. “I have wonderful secret remedies at my disposal. But I must see you alone, absolutely alone.” I forget what I answered, but I think it was something to the effect that I was bursting with rude health.

For nearly two months I worked in two little villages not far from Taormina—Letojanni and Sant Alessio—and, of course, in Taormina itself. But about the end of February I fell seriously ill, and was unable to do anything more. I only recovered after Easter from a very nasty attack of bronchitis, the result of being out in a dreadful storm one evening. Giovannino and I had been to Sant Alessio, where we had been distributing blankets, and where, with the help of an extremely kind (and quite genuine) Marchese, whose name I can’t remember, we managed to find out the names of all those who were in want. Out of the money given to me to distribute, I sent food for four weeks to this little village: macaroni, wine, beans and oil. That was what they asked for—the very poor people wouldn’t look at the delicious tinned foods that were sent in such quantities from all parts of the world. The Government provided bread. I also gave money enough to build two or three little wooden shelters—the winter was an unusually severe one: it rained heavily and continuously, and half the time the poor people were sleeping on the damp ground, or, when they were lucky, beneath the shelter of their boats. Nearly all the houses were uninhabitable in the villages by the sea.

A pretty dark-eyed Sicilian girl, Provvidenza Siligato, was among the first refugees who one day stood half starving in my little cottage. She pleaded

so passionately, so desperately to be given work in order to be able to support her sister's three little children, who stood clinging to her, that my heart melted, and I took her into my service there and then. Poor child! Her father and her fiancé had both been killed; she was only nineteen, but I have never come across a pluckier girl in my life. She made the clothes for every member of her family, daintily and charmingly, before she gave herself a thought. A flannel blouse of the simplest description was all she made for herself, and then, till the end of May, she worked for the other refugees. Her real unselfishness completely won my heart, and I had every reason to be thankful that I had taken her in when I fell ill some seven weeks later. She nursed me with the devotion of a daughter, and I was looked after by her and my faithful, kind Giovannino, with a tenderness it would be difficult to exaggerate.

Just before I left Taormina there was a slight earthquake. I happened to be in my dressing-room at the time. Poor Provvidenza, who was in the kitchen, went quite white, but my old cook, in order to reassure her, said: "Have no fear, my daughter, it isn't an earthquake—it is merely the Signorina stepping out of her bath." Well—really! And she didn't even get a month's warning! Which shows that however uncomplimentary Sicilian servants may be, their *padrone* are only too thankful to keep them!

I left Taormina at the end of May. I really felt that if I bought another inch of "false flannel" I'd die of depression. I longed to buy something charming and perfectly useless—a tortoiseshell poker, for instance, or a diamond tiara for the cook. Instead of that I bought a ticket for Como, and on the beloved shores of the lake soon recovered both health and spirits.

Some time after, I received a case with a silver

MY INDIAN SUMMER

medal inside. On one side of the medal were engraved these words:

“MEDAGLIA COMMEMORATIVA
TERREMOTO
CALABRO—SICULO,
28 DECEMBRE, 1908.”

On the other side was the effigy of the King, and round it was written:

“VITTORIO EMANUELE RE D’ITALIA.”

This was accompanied by the following words:

“Forwarded by His Majesty’s Ambassador in Rome at the request of the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

“BRITISH EMBASSY, ROME.

“May, 1911.”

But there were hundreds of people who deserved a medal far more than I did, and of whose devotion and kindness no one ever heard. My own servant, Giovannino, worked every bit as hard as I did, and Carmelo Longo, Robert Hichens’ servant, to my certain knowledge, gave away sums of money far greater than he could possibly afford. Both lads spent their money on their poor friends with a generosity that was really touching.

But when Giovannino rushed out one day, alone and unattended to buy some corsets, for the niece of one of his friends, I felt it was time to enter a protest. I believe they were intended for a surprise! I haven’t the slightest doubt that they fulfilled their mission to perfection — especially if they fitted! Whether she was ever able to get into them I never dared inquire!

In this necessarily limited account of that dreadful winter I have only alluded to the help given by the Sicilians I knew personally, and by the foreigners of

all nations who happened to be in Taormina at the time, and who started Relief Committees, devoted days and days into examining cases, distributed food and clothes even in distant mountain villages to which access was by no means easy, provided hundreds and hundreds of the planks with which shelters were made for homeless people, and collected the large sums of money which they spent not only wisely but promptly. I have done so for the simplest of reasons: I cannot write with real knowledge about anything else. I know absolutely nothing of the way the Italian Relief Committees were managed—I only know that the Sicilian doctors of Taormina, and of the villages I visited, spared themselves neither by day nor by night, and behaved with the unselfish devotion that is characteristic of their splendid profession.

What I do most earnestly wish to mention is the generous, the lovable way the people of the stricken district acknowledged and appreciated the help given by the foreign visitors. I was much impressed on more than one occasion by the absolute absence of what for want of a better word I will call the “mind-your-own-business” spirit, when the foreigners *en masse* took up the work almost as if the Province of Messina belonged to them. It is easy enough to say that their help and their money came in very conveniently—of course it did—but who among us does not know that a far greater generosity is often shown by the simple gratitude with which a benefit is received than in the bestowal of the benefit itself? Even in my very limited experience, I know that it is far more difficult to receive a gift than to bestow one. Who doesn't like to play *le beau rôle*?

I can, of course, only speak for myself, but the way in which the poor people blessed me for every little thing I did—the way people who owed me nothing thanked me for helping their countrymen—though I told them again and again that it was not a penny of my own money that I was distributing, and

that I was not making the slightest personal financial sacrifice—all this touched me to the heart. I told them times out of number that the money had been sent by my *amici Inglesi*; and I don't mind owning that I often had a lump in my throat as I said these words, for I felt proud of the way my friends had responded to my appeals, and more than touched by their belief that I, who am such a wretched business woman, was to be trusted, at all events on this occasion, to do what was best with the money they had sent so generously. The people of Taormina spoke so affectionately of us, their whole-hearted acknowledgment of our efforts was so universal, from kind Signor Floresta and his dear good wife down to the poorest of the poor, that their gratitude constitutes one of my most treasured memories. I am thankful I happened to be in Taormina at the time. I love Sicily, and am grateful to the bottom of my heart for having been allowed to be with her in her hour of bitter distress, and for having had the chance of being numbered among her faithful and devoted lovers!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I NEVER returned to my Taormina cottage. Owing to the floods that had immediately preceded the earthquake, it had become so damp that it was no longer fit to live in; many of my books and a great many of my scores were so damaged that I had to burn them, and both my pianos were spoiled, especially the beautiful Blüthner grand that had been presented to me by several of my friends at the suggestion of Mrs. Harry White, the wife of Mr. Harry White, subsequently Ambassador in Rome and Paris. But before I was able to get away I fell ill, and was laid up for weeks with bronchitis. That was during the latter part of the winter and part of the spring of 1909.

One evening Giovannino came quietly into my little study, which for the moment had been turned into a bedroom, as it contained a fire-place. When I looked up I saw that he was crying. I didn't know that the doctor had just told him that should there be any unfavourable change in my condition that night my chances of recovery would be very small. I remember saying: "Don't worry, Giovanineddo; there's nothing to cry about. I shall soon be well." But the tears kept running down his face.

Weeks afterwards, just before I gave up the cottage, he asked me if I could do without him for an hour or two. He told me he had made a vow that should my life be spared, he would give a certain amount of money to the poor, and he wanted to go up to Taormina in order to hand it over to the kind parish priest, Padre Bartolo, to distribute it as he thought best. Twenty-two years have passed away

since that evening, but only a few days ago I had a letter from him in which he said: "Oh, if only we were back again in Casa Felice where we were so happy!"

I also have known that longing, that terrible longing, to repeat certain happy episodes of my life, but since those episodes can never be repeated in the same conditions, I am sure it is far wiser to live with a few perfect memories.

On my return to England I spent several days in London, where I accepted an engagement to accompany my dear old friend, Harry Plunket Greene, in some of my songs, at a concert given by Lady Londesborough at her beautiful house in Regent's Park. Anna Pavlova was dancing there that night, and both King Edward and Queen Alexandra were present.

My sister Emmie returned from Chile at the end of that year with the intention of settling down in Florence. She was accompanied by my sister, Annie Compton, and her husband, Miss Bertha Martindale, the dear and faithful friend with whom she was going to live in the future, and two young girls whose parents were anxious for them to finish their education in Europe. I was in Rome when I received the news of their arrival in Genoa, and hurried to Florence to meet them. The next few days were chiefly devoted to house-hunting, and it wasn't long before my sister and Miss Martindale settled down at the Villa Mercede, an old house at Bellosguardo with a charming garden and lovely view. From that time I also made my headquarters at my sister's home, though I often went to Rome and Sicily for weeks at a time. It was during one of these visits to Rome that I met Miss Gertrude Bell at a tea given by Robert Hichens at the Grand Hotel. I sat next her, not realizing who she was at first, but when we began to talk about travelling she interested me so much that I hardly listened to anyone else. Just before the little

party broke up, she said: "You ought to come with me on my next expedition. I have always thought it would be so interesting to make a collection of the songs one hears on those long journeys across the desert."

How I would have loved to accompany her had it been possible! But I had neither the health nor the fortune to undertake such a journey. Since then, like all the rest of the world, I have read her celebrated *Letters* and a volume of *Persian Pictures*, of which she, apparently, did not think much but which appealed to me immensely; the glamour of the East was upon her when she wrote some of those pages, while others are brimming over with a *joie de vivre* that would indeed be hard to beat. As Sir E. Denison Ross says in his preface to these *Persian Pictures* (alluding to a letter of Gertrude Bell's written from Teheran): "This letter reminds us of the magic influence which the *Arabian Nights* exercises over us all, and which for every traveller colours the Islamic East with romance." To me the whole book seems to be written under that same magic influence, and it is that which makes it so attractive.

In the spring of 1910 I spent a few days at Stresa on Lake Maggiore. A friend in Rome who knew that I had been obliged to give up my cottage at Taormina had said to me: "Why don't you go to Stresa and have a look at some of the little villas there; it's such a beautiful part of the world. I'm sure you'd love it."

But beautifully situated as Stresa undoubtedly is, and beautiful as is the lake, it did not hold the same charm for me as Como, nor did I experience the slightest desire to make my home there, although I thoroughly enjoyed the short time I stayed at the big hotel, where I met Donna Vittoria Colonna for the first time. Robert Hichens, who was staying at the Villa d'Este at Como, came over to see us both, and introduced me to her, and with Donna Vittoria and

her English companion we made several delightful excursions on the lake.

I would willingly have prolonged my stay at Stresa had I not promised my friend, Kati Johnstone, to spend the month of June with her at the little château she had just bought on the Coteaux, in the neighbourhood of Pau, where she was living with her beautiful old mother. I was looking forward very much to seeing her again. She was an ideal companion, sympathetic, broad-minded, and quite beautifully good. She was one of those rare human beings who had not read the Sermon on the Mount and St. Paul's beautiful chapter on charity for nothing. But goodness had never encroached upon her sense of humour. Far from it! In one word, she was a darling.

So it was no wonder I didn't wish to postpone my visit, and after three or four days at Stresa, I went to Paris, rested there for some hours, and travelled on the night train to Pau, where I arrived about half-past six next morning. Two horses were harnessed to the little carriages waiting at the station, but instead of the usual driver on the box, a smart young postilion was mounted on one of the horses. I promptly engaged one of these attractive little vehicles, and told the man to go to Castel-Forgues. After we had left Pau well behind us, and had driven for a while up-hill through the sweet-smelling woods that somehow reminded me of Heidelberg and the fairy-tales I had read as a little child, I suddenly caught sight of a small château between the branches of the trees, a real little fairy-tale castle inhabited surely by a sleeping "Dornröschen," waiting for the advent of some handsome young Prince who was destined to awaken her.

"Oh," I thought, "if only that were Castel-Forgues! But it can't be. It would be too good to be true." But it *was* Castel-Forgues, with its splendid view over the Pyrenees, and its quaint

garden, more like a clearing in a wood, except for a great lawn in front of the house that sloped down to a long hedge of roses in full bloom, a lovely splash of colour against the distant mountains.

I was completely fascinated by the little place, and the daintily furnished rooms in which, for the first time, I saw the decorative effects of the celebrated *Toile de Jouy* of France. How I enjoyed that visit! Old Mrs. Johnstone had French blood in her veins, and talked to her children as often in French as in English, and although nominally American, and married to an Englishman, she was, I think, absolutely French at heart. And how gracefully she had grown old! She must have been quite lovely in her youth, and was still beautiful, tall and distinguished. She really was enough to make one fall in love with old age. Sometimes, during luncheon or dinner, she made amusing but, I'm afraid, rather disparaging remarks about English cooking. "En Angleterre," she said, "on fait toujours la cuisine à table!" She was, of course, alluding to the English habit of adding different condiments to the food served at table; in her opinion if it was so tasteless as to require being soured in Worcester sauce or anything else, it ought never to have left the kitchen. And I was unpatriotic enough to agree with her.

It was at Castel-Forgues that I met a priest who had been for years employed by the French Government for the purpose of finding water in the Sahara; his successful researches were responsible for many of the artesian wells in the Great Desert. Kati had heard that there was water on her little property, but up to that moment neither gardeners nor workmen had ever come across it. She asked this priest if he would examine the ground, and I remember the excitement of the other men when, after wandering about for a short time with his two-pronged stick, he found the water. What a curious gift this is! A young girl who has been employed by the Italian

Government during the recent excavations at Pompeii, and who possesses this gift, has not only discovered water, but also different kinds of metals by this apparently simple proceeding.

One day Kati offered me a little cottage in her grounds, free of rent. When I protested, she said, laughing: "Very well, then you can have it at a rent of £5 a year."

For a week or so I thought the matter over, and then, all at once, I realized how different everything would seem to me if those kind friends ever went away, even for short periods. I couldn't imagine living happily all alone among those woods in the winter, with the Pyrenees—splendid but austere—in the distance, far from any other habitation, and with no means of getting about. And a terrible nostalgia took possession of me as I thought of lovely Como and dear Taormina, where I had so many friends among the poor people who greeted me so kindly at every turn.

Even when I was quite alone in Taormina, when all my friends had gone away, I had no real, no aching desire to be anywhere else. And that is the true "home" feeling. One ought to be able to love one's home entirely for its own sake, even in the absence of one's nearest and dearest. I am certain of that.

After some happy, peaceful weeks spent chiefly in the garden and a comfortable donkey-cart driven by Kati, in which we explored the neighbourhood in a cosy, leisurely fashion, it became so hot that we all went to Biarritz for a breath of sea air. I can't remember Biarritz very well, but I shall never forget the ugliness of some of the villas near the sea. They might have been built to satisfy the requirements of some negroid "smart set." In many cases, short avenues led up to the front doors of these monstrosities lined on either side by stunted pillars crowned with hideous and enormous glass balls of various colours.

One of the houses suggested that Bluebeard and his wives were "in residence." Had I been one of the wives, I would have asked as a special favour to be hung even before my time.

One day Kati and I drove over to Spain, to Fuenterrabia, just across the frontier, where we lunched, and afterwards roamed about the picturesque old castle of Charles V, one of the most romantic castles I have ever seen.

We had the good luck to be driven there by a coachman who sometimes took part in our conversation and made really amusing remarks. He thoroughly appreciated our admiration of the Basque country, and told us he adored driving the English;—they, if you like, were fond of scenery!

"Voyez vous, Madame, c'est ce que je dis toujours . . . les Anglais, ce sont les apôtres du voyage! Quant aux Espagnols"—here he made a gesture of sublime contempt—"ils sont complètement indifférents aux beautés de la Nature. Tout ça vient d'Espagne à Biarritz rien que pour manger du chocolat dans nos pâtisseries. Voilà tout!"

The expression *Tout ça* reminds me of a story Liza Lehmann told me years ago. Her father and mother, accompanied by herself, her three sisters and their German governess, went one day to lunch at a restaurant in some little town on the Continent. As this procession of females filed past a table where two Frenchmen were sitting, one of them nudged the other and, pointing to Mr. Lehmann who brought up the rear, said quite audibly: "C'est le père de tout ça!"

It was while we were staying at Biarritz that the Spanish Ambassador to the Court of St. James, who was a friend of Mrs. Johnstone's, invited her and Kati to an afternoon party she was giving to the Queen of Spain (formerly Princess Ena of Battenberg). As I was staying with them I was included in the invitation, but much as I wanted to accept it I had to refuse; my

face was so ravaged by mosquito-bites that I shouldn't have had the courage to go to a mothers' meeting looking such a fright, much less to a party such as this was likely to be. After I had seen the others off, I got into the coolest frock I possessed, and made my way (like *Tout ça*) to one of the famous *pâtisseries* to have tea. I must have asked the porter of our hotel to tell me where to go, for I hadn't been there for more than a quarter of an hour when a servant turned up with a note from the daughter of the Ambassador. It was a charming little note, but before I got to the end of it I felt like the man in "Annie Laurie" who declared that he could "lay him doon and dee." For this is what she said in it:

"We are in despair. The artist whom we had engaged for this afternoon has wired from Paris to say she is ill and cannot come, and we do so want to have some music for the Queen. Will you save the situation and come in spite of everything?"

The servant was waiting for the answer. I hated the idea of going among a crowd of strangers in such an appalling condition, but I felt it would be churlish, not to say petty, to refuse to come to the rescue. So I scribbled a note to say that if she would tell the Queen that I wasn't fit to be seen, I would turn up in a few minutes. I rushed home, put on a black veil, and went to the party.

And never did anyone put me at my ease more quickly and more charmingly than the young Queen. She was looking extremely pretty that day; I thought her eyes were lovely. I remember how quickly she rose from her chair and shook hands with me, telling me how much she liked my songs. She asked me to play a good many of them, and by the time the party was over I'd almost forgotten my deplorable appearance. But not quite! I hadn't forgotten to keep my veil down. Just before the party broke up I heard the Ambassador say a few words to Mrs. Johnstone.

She said that at one time certain people had endeavoured to make mischief between the Queen and her mother-in-law. And then she added: "Et si ces deux femmes n'avaient pas été foncièrement bonnes ils auraient peut-être réussi."

Foncièrement bonne. That is just the impression she made on me. I repeat these words, not because she was a queen and was kind to me, but because I am sure they were true, and though she must have forgotten my existence long ago, it is a real pleasure to me to remember, especially at this sad moment of her life, that these words were said of her. On my own account I should like to add: "*foncièrement* warm-hearted." And isn't that enough to make anyone love a woman, be she queen or peasant?

I often wish I had made a larger collection of the mutilated English telegrams that some of my friends and myself have received in Italy and Sicily. Some of them have been positively cryptic. What, for instance, is one to make of the word *gunsh*?—which eventually turned out to be "sunshine"!

The following is a telegram addressed by the Duchess of Aosta to a friend, who sent it on to Robert Hichens, who gave it to me:

"Though not at all *impensierita* for my husband I don't like to leave him yet and don't know V Ohen I shall come eack So sorry not to see you before you start and very De Sa—Pointed not to see Mr. Robert Hichen My sister and I were so anctions to know the oter of those lovely books we Eots loved."

And when I was at Taormina in the spring of 1911, living in a little house called Valverde with my two dear servants, old Catina and Giovannino, the following telegram was handed to me one morning:

"Will you redeem kind promise made *Sannif* barn to use your influence, supported by Mr. *Pitchins* *White* Hôtel Timeo for good sunny room to-night.

"P. METTERNICH,"

The words in italics are meant for "Hall," "Hichens," and "with," and the telegram alluded to the request made to me by the German Ambassador in 1908 at Hall Barn, Lord Burnham's place, when he asked me if I would secure a room for him at the Timeo. The earthquake prevented him from coming. But now he was arriving almost immediately. I went out and secured a room, but it was anything but a good one. The hotel was, as usual, crammed full, and I could only get a room at the back of the house; as he was only staying for a short time it didn't matter very much.

I only knew him very slightly indeed, but when he asked me next day if I would show him round Taormina, I naturally agreed to do so and spent the whole of that day and part of the next with him. I liked him. Some very well-known London people were in Taormina at the time, and when they saw me with him told me that they considered him extremely tiresome and were very glad that *they* were not obliged to have anything to do with him. I was secretly amused, because he had told me point blank that he didn't wish to have anything to do with them. "I can't stand noisy people," was his only answer when I said that they were really very agreeable. "They are noisy," he repeated. "I have a horror of people who are noisy in public places." I also have a rooted objection to people who make themselves conspicuous; but these particular people had been really charming to me, so I felt in duty bound to hold a brief for them.

Count Metternich struck me personally as a distinctly good-looking aristocrat. But when he asked me to dine with him at the San Domenico Hotel in order to avoid my "noisy" friends, I realized that he was probably a man whose prejudices were not to be easily undermined. We had an interesting conversation at dinner—a very good one with plenty of champagne. Somehow we touched on

the subject of German literature, and I told him that I had just been reading some books by Max Nordau, lent to me by Admiral Maxse. He then told me that he knew Nordau, and spoke at some length about him, but when I asked if he had seen him lately he said: "No, I haven't." A puzzled look came into his face as he added: "Have you ever come across any of our German middle class?"

I said I had—very often indeed.

"Well then," he continued, "have you ever noticed something about them that is really quite peculiar to them—something . . . I hardly know *what* to call it, but . . ."

I began to laugh and said: "I'm certain I know what you mean. It is a perfect genius for taking offence where none is meant, and for keeping you in the dark when you ask for an explanation for their sudden change of attitude."

"Yes," he said, quite eagerly. "That is exactly what it is. Would you believe that I know nothing about Max Nordau now, though we were on perfectly friendly terms till one day I discovered that he was mortally offended with me. He refused to enter into any explanation, and our friendship came to an end without my ever knowing the reason why."

Next day Count Metternich went to Castello Maniace, Sir Alex. Hood's place near Etna, and I saw no more of him. But on my return to England one of the first invitations I received was to a dinner party at the German Embassy.

Taormina was not only the "Land of the Almond Blossom"; it was also the land of "*most strange*" happenings, to borrow an expression of a German lady who lived there and knew both the place and its inhabitants intimately. One of these "happenings" I must relate.

A certain English resident engaged a man cook. No sooner had she done so than she was informed that he was a murderer, and that he had only just

been let out of prison where he had been detained for doing away with his mother-in-law.

His version of the story differed *in toto* from that of his accusers. This poor, misunderstood murderer lived in a hovel half-way up the steps near the Hôtel Timeo. "One day," he said, "I was standing on the steps just outside my house while my mother-in-law was climbing up them. When she got to the top I gave her a look. Why shouldn't I? But no sooner did she catch my eye than she immediately rolled down the steps and was picked up dead at the bottom. In what way was I to blame, and why had I to sit in prison because I gave my mother-in-law a look?"

As nobody was able to answer this satisfactorily, the English resident turned a deaf ear to his accusers and kept him on.

A really startling thing that happened to me in Taormina may interest those of my friends who up to the present moment have never looked upon me as an outstanding and dominating figure in the great world of finance. One day the late Lord Northampton turned up, with Mrs. Leopold Rothschild and her sister, Mrs. Sassoon. Lord Northampton was a very old and good friend of mine. He looked me up as soon as he arrived and asked me to come and lunch with them at the Hôtel San Domenico, where they were staying. After luncheon, I offered to go with Mrs. Rothschild to some of the antiquity shops and to another shop where I knew that some lovely old Sicilian work was to be had. Mrs. Rothschild bought several things at this latter place, and then discovered that she had left her purse at the hotel. She was told that it didn't matter in the least, and that she was quite at liberty to take away her purchases.

"It is enough," said the owner of the shop, "that you have been accompanied here by la Signorina Whitey. Anyone *she* recommends I am always willing to trust."

MY INDIAN SUMMER

That I should have stood guarantee for a member of the Rothschild family is one of those "most strange" things that could only have happened in Taormina. Nevertheless I can't help feeling that after this incident it would be childish not to reckon with me as one of the great personalities who make and mar the destinies of men.

I remember the summer and autumn of 1911 with more than usual interest, for it had just been settled that Robert Hichens' great novel, *The Garden of Allah*, should be produced as a play in New York. He was staying in Broadway at a cottage next to Court Farm, the Navarros' country place, where he was working in collaboration with Mary de Navarro, and I was on my usual visit to my dear old friends. From the very first he had been anxious that Mary should play the part of Domini, the heroine of the play. She was still so popular, so beloved in America, and it was a rôle that would have suited her to such perfection. The mere fact that she was herself a Catholic would have enabled her to play the part with a deep and complete understanding of the motives that led that great-hearted woman to make her supreme sacrifice. Mary's beauty of face and figure would have lent the rôle such additional attraction that it is a thousand pities she did not play it. Nothing, however, would induce her to return to the stage. She didn't even want to go to America to help to produce the play, though she was ultimately persuaded to do so, and R. H. had already been in New York for some little time before she joined him there with her husband.

I still possess several interesting and amusing letters written to me from New York by my dear friend.

In the first one he describes his arrival. Two newspaper reporters who boarded the ship from a revenue cutter kept him in conversation for ages;

when the vessel docked, innumerable other journalists appeared on the scene, and before leaving the ship he had to return six times to be photographed. The whole of the rest of the day seems to have been spent in being interviewed by journalists who, he said, were very civil and agreeable, and it was almost evening before he had even a chance of unpacking. "I can hear you laugh," he writes, after telling me about an article with the headline "Departure from England." "Well, it must be endured, but I really dislike personal publicity very much, and felt almost desperate when we neared New York." After describing the smart and expensive apartment that had been taken for him at the St. Regis Hotel on Fifth Avenue, he adds: "I feel an ostentatious brute." That was a *cri du cœur* at which I really *did* laugh, for anyone less deserving of that epithet I have never met.

As he knew how interested I was in this production he very kindly kept me *au courant* of what was going on, and I knew to some extent how things were progressing. It certainly wasn't all plain sailing for the poor author, who was coping to the best of his abilities with many difficulties. The actress impersonating Domini had already told him that she hadn't the slightest sympathy with any of her religious beliefs, a frame of mind which was hardly calculated to improve her acting, and R. H.'s appeal: "Well, even if that is the case, won't you try and imagine, for the sake of the play, that you *do* share those beliefs?" had no effect upon her. But when she insisted on appearing in an elaborate evening dress during a sand-storm in the desert, the climax was reached. She burst into tears at the bare idea of wearing anything less becoming. When it came to fighting with a weeping *combinazione* of frills and furbelows, poor R. H. collapsed ingloriously, and the task of persuading the lady to adopt a more suitable costume was relegated to Mary

who, I believe, emerged victoriously from the ordeal.

Lewis Waller made a very great success in the rôle of Boris Androvsky. As far as I can remember, the play had been offered to him, but he feared to risk production and merely undertook to act in it. He must have regretted his decision more than once, for its success was immediate; it ran for years in America, besides its long run at Drury Lane where it was first produced in 1920. Some years later, when I was again staying at Court Farm, Mary received a letter which caused us all a good deal of amusement. It was from an actor who played some minor part in *The Garden of Allah*, and who told her that they had been touring in a district where children were not allowed to appear on the stage. In his letter he said: "That being the case we engaged a dwarf who made a real cunning substitute for Domini's little boy in the last act!"

I am not sure, but I think it was about this time that I made the acquaintance of the late Gervase Elwes. I had been invited to meet him at the house of my beautiful friend, Mrs. William Rathbone.

"He sings your 'King Charles' splendidly," she said. "You really must hear him."

He hadn't then developed into a tenor, but as a baritone his voice struck me as beautiful. He was a musician to the finger-tips. His sense of rhythm was splendid. It would have been difficult indeed to have beaten Plunket Greene's singing of "King Charles," but Gervase Elwes sang it with such spirit, and I was so enthusiastic about him that the former said to me, laughing: "Don't rave *too* much about Elwes' singing of 'King Charles,' or you'll rouse my jealousy." But that would have been a task beyond me or anyone else. Harry Greene simply didn't know how to be jealous of a colleague, his nature was far too generous. Of all my songs it is "So we'll go no more a-roving" that is associated with

MY INDIAN SUMMER

Gervase Elwes. He sang it all over England, and many a time I accompanied him in it. He and Plunket Greene, to the best of my remembrance, helped me with all the "Lord Roberts" concerts I gave during the Great War.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SHORTLY after the production of *The Garden of Allah* in New York, arrangements were made for me to go to America in order to give a series of recitals of my own songs. I was to take a singer with me. These arrangements were anything but satisfactory, for everything went wrong from the beginning. I can't remember whether the idea of this concert tour originated with me after the visit of an American impresario to Taormina, where I was again spending the spring, or whether it was suggested to me by my friends; but if I *was* responsible for it, I can only say it was another case of what Mademoiselle Lalande¹ used to call "*encore une de ces idées lumineuses de cette bonne Maude*"; a verdict which she pronounced in a voice that was enough to convey to the most casual listener that what I looked upon as an inspiration never by any chance contained a grain of common sense.

After a great deal of trouble, an impresario was unearthed for me by an American friend, who had formerly been connected with the musical profession. He (the impresario) was a German American Jew. He undertook to "run" me. And so he did. He ran me into debt. He insisted on an advance of £100, which I didn't possess, but which I managed to raise with considerable difficulty. I then gave him the money, and he immediately gave me every reason to regret that I had done so. What he did with that £100 I don't know, and never shall,

¹ The French lady at whose school in Paris I was educated.

for it was never satisfactorily accounted for. I naturally thought it was being spent in furthering my interests, and I dare say it was, as he asked me to send him a photograph of myself by means of which, he said, he would advertise me all over the United States. This sounded promising, and after a few days I sent him a photograph in which I had done my best to pose as a successful and world-renowned celebrity! I was taken in evening dress; my hair was dressed elaborately in the fashion of the day, and a black velvet hat, the size of a small cart-wheel, was perched on top; the conventional fur stole was thrown round my shoulders, and I looked so entirely unlike my usual self that I was quite delighted. He was not. He was disgusted. He wrote and asked me what I meant by sending him a cabinet photograph. He required one more or less life-size, the sort that would look well on hoardings! But by this time I had no more money to spend on photographs or anything else.

I had been advised to take as many introductions as possible to people of importance in New York, Boston, Washington, Chicago, etc., and had been obliged to spend a certain amount on clothes, which I bought in Paris. I had no difficulty in obtaining the introductions, and when I went to London the Duchess of Marlborough, (formerly Miss Consuelo Vanderbilt) very kindly gave me letters, not only to her own people but also to many of her friends. When I told her that my impresario had not succeeded in organizing any recitals for me during the winter, and was advising me to go out in the spring, she begged me not to entertain that idea for a moment. She said it would be a great mistake, as the season would be over and there would be no chance of private engagements in New York.

The impresario was not entirely to blame. It had been impossible for him to fix any dates for the winter on account of the ever-recurring difficulties

and objections made by the singer who was to accompany me, and who finally refused to fulfil the conditions of the contract he had signed in London when I engaged him. At last things became so impossible that I had to break off all negotiations with him. By this time the winter was nearly over, and after my talk with the Duchess I made up my mind to abandon all thoughts of going to America, although it meant the loss of my hundred pounds. I have every reason to be thankful that I did so, for otherwise I would assuredly have travelled on board the ill-fated *Titanic* with Frank Millet, the well-known artist and a dear old Broadway friend, who was going to New York on business, and who, alas, was one of the passengers drowned when the *Titanic* was wrecked.

Instead of going to America I went to London, where I gave a concert that proved financially successful and helped to put things more or less right and where I also made the acquaintance of the Russian wife of my old friend Monty Balfour, whom I had known ever since he was a schoolboy. Valérie Balfour and I dined together one evening at her father-in-law's house in Pont Street, and there and then we made friends. She was a lovable, charming woman, and when towards the end of the evening she asked me to pay her a visit at her home in South Russia in the following June (we were then in April), I was only too delighted to accept her invitation, especially when she added: "And we'll go for a motor-tour in the Crimea."

At that time I was living with my sister Emmie in Florence. I was just on the eve of returning to Italy and I remember Mr. Balfour (*père*), who still went by the name of "Macfiend" among us all, telling his daughter-in-law not to count upon me as I most certainly should not turn up. I assured him that he was very much mistaken, but I knew of old that nothing but a Niagara of affectionate abuse was

to be gained by arguing with him, and speedily dropped the subject. I was very fond of Macfiend, who was always extremely kind to me, but he certainly possessed a unique temper that had to be reckoned with. "Placid" was not a word that could be truthfully applied to him; and he was not in the least like a certain uncle of mine, who was *so* calm that one of my cousins caricatured him reading *The Times* seated on the flame of a candle stuck into a bedroom candlestick. An amusing incident connected with Macfiend's temper occurred years ago when he, two of his children, and I were travelling in Switzerland. The rest of his numerous family had gone on an expedition with Dr. Munthe—of San Michele fame—they wouldn't demean themselves by coming with us; there was nothing sensational about *our* expedition, and when we met again after our respective wanderings we were actually accused of having crossed the Furka Pass in a cab, while they . . . !

Macfiend had a perfect passion for Parmesan cheese, and woe betide those who happened to be dining with him if it failed to make its appearance with the soup. One day this actually happened. D. D.,¹ his eldest daughter, had been told to order it as soon as we reached the little country inn where we were to spend a couple of days, but she had forgotten to do so, and the awful moment arrived (with the soup) when she was forced to admit her guilt. How she found the courage to tell the truth beats me. George Washington's celebrated truth-telling was a joke compared to hers, which, in the twinkling of an eye, plunged the whole party into a gloom that was positively infernal. Macfiend, looking like Pluto, sat—dangerously silent—at the head of the table, while we shook in our shoes and *didn't* wonder what would happen next, for we all knew there would be an explosion, and that it was only a question of

¹ Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton.

time. Next day two soup tureens were placed in front of him; one of them contained bouillon for the whole party, the other was filled with grated Parmesan cheese for him alone. The *maître d'hôtel* was determined to be on the safe side. No doubt D. D. had made a frantic appeal to him not to fail her, and his Swiss chivalry had manifested itself in this very practical way. Macfiend, on his dignity, appeared to take soup tureen No. 2 as a matter of course, which was really a *tour de force* on his part. When the cover was removed and its contents revealed—contents that looked like miniature sand-dunes in a China bowl masquerading as the desert—we did our best to keep serious, but it was entirely beyond our power to do so, though we nearly choked in the attempt. Even Macfiend threw up the sponge at last and laughed as much as we did.

As a matter of fact "*l'affaire* Parmesan cheese" was all to our advantage, for the owner of the little inn came to the conclusion that Macfiend was evidently a satisfactory and kindly *père de famille*, and when the next day he was asked whether he would accept a cheque on a London bank as none of us had sufficient Swiss money to pay the bill, he said without a moment's hesitation: "*Mais oui, Monsieur, avec plaisir. Quant aux voyageurs . . . j'ai le coup-d'œil.*"

Shortly after meeting Valérie Balfour in Pont Street, I found myself again in Florence, where I spent the month of May with my sister at Villa Nuti, a delightful rambling old villa which she had rented from the late Mrs. Spencer Stanhope, and which was beautifully situated in Bellosguardo. When I told her that I meant to go to Russia in June she was rather taken aback; she thought the journey would be too much for me, and when I had one of my tiresome breakdowns towards the end of May she did all she could to dissuade me from going.

But I couldn't make up my mind to give up that

journey—and for two reasons. Not only did the idea of a visit to South Russia in such agreeable circumstances fascinate me to an unusual degree, but at the back of my mind I had a strange feeling that the destiny of another person dear to me was involved in this visit. And, strangely enough, this came to pass. In that strange book, *Malaisie*, by Henri Fauconnier, the following passage occurs: “Il suffit d’être prêt à accueillir l’appel le plus vague de la destinée et alors de réaliser l’avenir dans le fonds de son cœur. Les événements s’arrangent ensuite.” I am convinced that it is a great mistake to ignore a very strong presentiment.

I once acted in distinct contradiction to a similar instinct, and regretted it bitterly for seven long years.

A few days before I started, I was sitting in the drawing-room when a young girl was shown in. She said she was waiting for a friend who had come to see my sister on a matter of business. After a few minutes’ conversation, she told me she was a Russian.

“Oh,” I said, “I am going to Russia in a few days, and I don’t know a word of Russian. I can’t think how I am going to manage.”

“I’ll teach you if you like,” she said, smiling, and the next moment I was having my first lesson, which was followed by several others, during which I mastered a few useful little sentences about food, trains, luggage, etc. Being an optimist, I now hoped to extricate myself from any difficulties in which I might be involved.

This young girl had had a tragic experience. She had been exiled to Siberia for three years, her only offence being that she had given instruction to a few peasants in the neighbourhood of her home. But she was accused of harbouring sinister designs, and was actually thrown into prison with degraded and criminal women of the lowest class. The greater part of the journey to Siberia had been made on foot. When she arrived at the village where she was to spend the next

three years, she made up her mind to look after the sick. An accomplished masseuse, she knew a great deal about nursing, and the peasants soon became really attached to her. She was a kind, warm-hearted girl, very unselfish, and clever and well-educated into the bargain.

After two monotonous and dreary years, she felt such a desperate longing to be free that she determined to try and escape. She made a confidant of one of the peasants to whose family she had been very kind, and implored him to help her. The village to which she had been transported was situated on the borders of Russia, and this peasant often drove to a town just across the frontier to sell the produce of his little farm. She asked him if it would not be possible for her to accompany him on one of the next market days, and he said he thought it might be managed if she dressed herself in peasant clothes, and took nothing with her but a large basket of eggs on the pretext of being able to obtain a better price for them in the Russian town; of course she would have to pretend that she was returning home that same day. It was a dangerous experiment, but there was just a chance that it might succeed if she kept cool and played her part well.

One morning they started off together; when they reached the frontier he told her to wait in the cart while he explained matters to the official. He was away for so long that she felt sick with anxiety; she thought he might have betrayed her at the last moment. But her fears were groundless. The man had been a true friend, and at last she passed the frontier.

How she managed to reach Petersburg I don't know, for when she was telling me the story she was so often overcome with emotion on reaching the most critical moments that I really *couldn't* torment her with questions, though I was so immensely interested. Anyhow, when she did reach the capital, she went straight to the house of some friends, who immediately

did their best to help her out of the country. A certain Princess — actually gave the girl her own passport, and told her she must pass herself off as a rich, independent woman travelling for pleasure. With this object she was given some beautiful clothes and valuable furs and plentifully supplied with money. They even told her to assume an arrogant, dictatorial manner when she reached the frontier. I conclude that she had to get out of the Russian train and into an Austrian one, for her friends told her not to attempt to hurry past the *agents de police* who stood in front of each carriage as the occupants stepped out of them, but to walk slowly and deliberately down the platform. They also told her to hand her passport with the greatest nonchalance to the inspector.

Her relief and joy may be imagined when she found herself on Austrian soil. No passports were needed in Europe at that time except in Russia, which didn't even consider itself as part of the continent. When I was in Russia they always talked about "going to Europe" if they were going to France or Switzerland. My little friend could hardly believe in her good fortune when she finally reached Florence; there she settled down and earned her living as a masseuse, and for some time gave me Russian lessons as well.

I travelled via Venice to Vienna, where I slept and spent the following day, as my train only started towards night. My dear old friends, the Ferstels, were all out of town, and when I called at the beautiful flat in Maximilian Platz, where Emmie and I had spent so many happy days with them, the only person who recognized me was the house-porter, who said that of course he hadn't forgotten the "Englische Kinder"—the name by which we were known to our Viennese friends decades ago. That same afternoon I went to buy my ticket for Usovka, my ultimate destination in the Don Cossack country, but was only able to book as far as Ekaterinoslav, a seven hours

journey further on. I was told that I must get another ticket there. I heard this with dismay, for I didn't know what it would cost, and certainly didn't know sufficient Russian to discuss money matters. I travelled for a short time in Poland with a charming Polish schoolboy, who had the most enormous appetite. We were the sole occupants of the dining-car, and he looked after me as well as after himself, but when he had gone steadily through the menu, including cheese and fruit, he called the waiter and ordered another beefsteak!

At the frontier I had a wildly exciting time; we had to wait for about an hour, and I was obliged to give up my passport, though I had been told to cling to it like grim death, as in Russia I couldn't even be admitted to an hotel without it. When the bell rang as a warning that the Russian train was just about to start I really felt desperate, for they hadn't returned the passport, and I didn't even know whom to ask for it. Mercifully, at the last moment an official shoved it into my hand, and I promptly kidnapped a porter and hung on to him until he had seen me into quite the most comfortable railway carriage I have ever travelled in, and which I had all to myself for two nights till we reached Ekaterinoslav. During the whole of the journey I read Dostoevsky's famous novel, *Les frères Karamazov*. When I finished the book I felt as if I had been born and bred in Russia—but certainly not in the Russia of to-day.

I had been given to understand that all educated Russians spoke French, but that is very far from true in South Russia at all events, where it isn't even safe to address a letter to a friend in Latin characters. Every time Mrs. Balfour wrote to me when I was in Florence she enclosed an envelope addressed to herself in Russian characters, to ensure safe delivery, and I did the same when I wrote from Usovskia to friends in England and Italy.

A restaurant-car was attached to the train, and

as there were several agreeable-looking people lunching and dining, I thought I would ask one of them to help me to get the extra ticket when we reached Ekaterinoslav. Not a single person I addressed understood a word I said. Suddenly, to my intense relief, a young girl spoke to me in French. She was returning from Lausanne, where she had been to school, and was travelling with her father to their home in the Caucasus. After a few words with her explaining my difficulty, she spoke to her father. Then she turned to me and said: "My father asks me to tell you that should the ticket to Usovskia cost more than you actually have with you in Russian money, he will be very happy to lend you all that is necessary." I immediately offered him a cheque for the pound or two of which I might stand in need, but he wouldn't take it. Nothing I could do or say was able to persuade him to accept it, and he told me it would be quite all right if I would send him the money from Usovskia.

The restaurant-car was taken off several hours before we reached Ekaterinoslav, and we all lunched together at a large railway restaurant. A grave-looking Persian was seated opposite to us, and evidently my little friend's father must have said something to him about me, for he insisted on sharing his delicious bottle of mineral water with me; and when I went to the counter to pay my bill I found that the Russian had forestalled me and had paid for my luncheon before I had the chance of doing so. This kindness to a perfect stranger made a very real impression on me. It was quite useless to try to repay him. He wouldn't hear of it. Fortunately when we reached Ekaterinoslav I found that after paying for my ticket I still had seventeen roubles left, so that there was no need to trespass on my new friend's kindness, which I shall never forget.

I once had a little talk with Valérie Balfour about this beautiful and spontaneous quality of her com-

patriots, and she said what I thought was absolutely true: "But the English also are wonderfully kind and hospitable, though perhaps we go just one better, for you can't make up your minds to sacrifice your privacy, whereas we Russians, at a push, will even share our bedrooms with a total stranger."

I was bound to admit that I didn't know many English people in her class of life who could bring themselves to do that, and—to use an amusing American expression that I learnt from Mary de Navarro—"that's where they have *the bulge* on us."

When the train reached Usovská, about six-thirty a.m., I found Monty Balfour waiting for me on the platform. He must have got up at an unearthly hour to do so, for their house was quite a long way from the station. How glad I was to see his kind, familiar face after all my anxiety! It was an exquisite morning in June, and although I was very tired, I thoroughly enjoyed the long drive through the fields, where I saw a sight that reminded me of Maniace and Sicily—a long string of peasants working under an overseer.

Valérie was waiting to welcome me, and after I had been hugged and kissed we immediately sat down to breakfast, which differed slightly from an English one, as instead of cups, very pretty glasses were on the table, and instead of milk, slices of lemon were served with the tea, while the traditional samovar stood at the head of the table. After breakfast they insisted on my going to bed and having a good rest, as they were anxious for me to be present at a dinner they were giving that evening to the bishop of the diocese, some deacons and the bishop's secretary, all of whom were spending the night at their house. It was to be a characteristically Russian meal and they thought—and were quite right in thinking—that this function would interest me.

I must say it was unlike any other at which I have ever been present. The table literally groaned under

the weight of all sorts of unfamiliar but delicious dishes, while the floods of wine that were served all during the meal were really surprising. But more so by far was the speed and frequency with which they emptied glass after glass. They drank of everything. Again and again their glasses were filled to the brim with vodka, kvass, brandy, whisky, white wine, claret, port, sherry, champagne and liqueurs of every sort and description. The bishop sat between Valérie and myself (we were the only two women present), and I saw him go steadily through them all. One of the deacons, who had long hair, combed it at table; as it wasn't the fashion in those days to make one's toilet in public I was frankly taken aback. I'm quite sure he and the bishop could have drunk double the amount they actually did, for they didn't even look flushed, but the secretary's inside was evidently of a less robust nature and after we had been at table for about three hours, he rushed out of the room only just in time to spare us an extremely unpleasant exhibition! Some time after this my poor hostess whispered to me in English: "I'm dead tired, I can't bear this much longer." "Well," I said, "you can easily make me the excuse for leaving the table. Tell them I've just had a three days' journey, and they'll easily understand that I want to go to bed. You can say you are going to see me to my room and then you can escape to your own." But she said they would be offended if she got up before they did. I hated to leave her alone, and sat there for another half-hour, but at last I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer and was obliged to wish everyone good night, hoping they would take the hint and go to bed themselves.

I heard next day that they had sat there drinking till three o'clock in the morning.

What I enjoyed most during my visit were the long motor drives across the steppe. When the great heat of the day was over we would drive for

miles till we reached the house of a friend with whom it had been arranged that we should have supper. One of these country houses was just like those I had read about in Russian books, and the life led by its owners apparently resembled the lives led by the people in those books. There was an English nurse for the babies, a French governess for the elder children, and no doubt a German tutor for the boys.

It is no wonder that Russians of the upper classes are good linguists; not because, according to general belief, their own language is so difficult that they master all others with comparative ease, but because their foreign teachers and servants find the learning of Russian such formidable and up-hill work that they never speak to their little charges in any language but their own, English, French or German, as the case may be. On the other hand, foreign servants who come to our country find English so easy that as soon as they have grasped a few sentences they refuse to speak anything else; to know English is a distinct asset to them, and they benefit themselves at the expense of the children for whose sake they have been expressly engaged.

Driving across the vast, interminable steppe always seemed to me like racing across the sky, and sometimes at night, when the stars were out, those drives almost intoxicated me; insensibly one gave oneself up to dreams, to vague longings. I am bound to say that now and again one was forcibly brought face to face with reality when the car suddenly plunged into some enormous hole, from which the chauffeur extricated it with a tremendous jerk. Not once did we meet with an accident. We generally carried one or two toy pistols, which were fired off at the dogs which swarmed round the car when we passed through a village; the noise always frightened them away. Sometimes we passed little German settlements that looked wonderfully prosperous; the cottages were beautifully clean and the gardens all

well kept; very different from the Russian villages which often appeared to be in the last stages of decay.

One evening, after driving for hours, we came to the house of a railway official with whom Monty had some business to transact. He didn't happen to be at home when we arrived, and his old father received us—in his night-clothes! He wasn't the least embarrassed. Some ancestor of his must have been related—by marriage—to Madame Sans-Gêne. The only ornament in the room was, to say the least of it, a peculiar one. It consisted of a sort of huge tassel which hung from the ceiling and was made of dried fish, all clinging frantically to one another. As no one was paying any attention to me, and as the room in which we were sitting led into several others, I thought I'd peep into them. Unfortunately, I did more than peep; I crossed the threshold, and no sooner had I done so than an enormous parrot, shrieking loudly, flew out of a corner and proceeded to attack me. I didn't attempt to defend myself, but bolted into the next room where a dog—a born sneak—was lying in wait for me. The brute never gave a sign of life till I was well inside the room, when he rushed at me with—apparently—every intention of reducing me to mincemeat. I didn't dare take shelter in the next room which, for all I knew, might be swarming with horned vipers, and at all risks I determined to beat a hasty retreat to the room into which we had originally been shown, and where the grandfather in his night-clothes was still talking to Monty. The sight of those clothes was really a welcome one. They, at all events, suggested peace, long hours of sleep and cheerful snores, undisturbed by hysterical parrots and obnoxious dogs. After all these hair-breadth escapes I wasn't sorry to sit down with the rest of them to an excellent supper. To my intense relief the parrot and the dog remained in their own apartments.

Now and again the Balfours gave an informal tea

to the wives of the principal members of the staff who worked with Monty on the enormous estate he administrated. I was present at one of these teas, and was almost hypnotized by the appearance of one of the guests. I could hardly take my eyes off her. She was ugly to a degree that was positively audacious, and which would have constituted a tragedy to any other woman. But she didn't even seem conscious of it. On the contrary, she appeared to be perfectly satisfied with herself, and looked rather critically at everyone else. She was dressed in absolute defiance of all the conventions; her hair was pitilessly dragged off her forehead and looked as if it were horribly disappointed at not having been torn out by the roots, for then at least it would not have been obliged to have anything more to do with her. The way it was dressed was a capillary crime. It was gathered together at an absolutely wrong angle of her head in a knot that looked like a large brown pill. To say she *wore* a hat is to tamper with the truth. A black hat, that looked as if someone in the next room had flung it on to her head in a fit of ungovernable rage, sat unconcernedly on top of the brown pill. Suddenly I caught Monty's eye. He was doing his best not to laugh at my obvious amazement at his extraordinary-looking guest. After they had all gone he said to me: "I must say she *does* look as if she had come into the world shrieking 'Je m'en fiche.'"

And though, when he told me the following story, he did *not* begin it with the words of Massenet's song,

"Ouvre tes yeux bleus, ma mignonne,"

I nevertheless did open my eyes to a far greater extent than I had ever opened them before.

This freak, from whom even a gorilla might have fled for fear of being compromised, had actually strayed from the paths of virtue, owing to the sole fact, I imagine, that in the Don Cossack country they are not *too* strictly patrolled. What's more, she had

strayed from these prim paths in company with an extremely nice-looking man, who subsequently married her. I met him a few days later, and gazed at him with even greater amazement.

And yet there are people who say that the age of miracles is past!

One day I announced my intention of making a little excursion to the Caucasus. It had always been one of the dreams of my life to visit that country; the very sound of its name spelt romance to me, and I was determined not to lose the chance of going now that I was within reasonable distance. To my delight, Valérie said she would love to accompany me; she had never been there, and forthwith set to work to make all arrangements for the journey. As it happened, there was a schoolmaster in Usovskia whose home was in the Caucasus, on the shores of the Black Sea. His eldest daughter had just returned from Petersburg, where she had been studying, and he, his wife, and another little daughter were all going to spend the summer holidays at home and were leaving almost directly. We decided to join them, and without any loss of time took our tickets for Novorossisk, our first halting-place, where we were to embark for Sotchi, a picturesque little port on the Black Sea.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WE only stayed in Novorossisk for a few hours. During part of that time we went for a walk in a public garden, which certainly didn't give the impression of a popular resort. It was a dreary, uninteresting place, and the only people we saw were two children of about nine years old, a boy and a girl; the boy, wearing a top-hat and a coat that looked like a dressing-gown, was walking arm in arm with the little girl, who was dressed as queerly as himself. They were silent when we passed them; they seemed to be taking themselves very seriously; perhaps — being Russian — they had been discussing their *état d'âme*. What they looked like was an old married couple who had shrunk (in every sense of the word) from the dreadful consequences of wedded life, till they had reached their present diminutive proportions.

We went on board at eight o'clock. The sea was as smooth as glass, so I went down to dinner with our cicerone, the schoolmaster, while Valérie stayed on deck. While we were waiting to be served he asked me what I thought she would like. That much I *did* make out, but I knew so little Russian that it was out of my power to suggest anything. He repeated the word *tsiplionok*¹ again and again, but I hadn't the faintest idea what he meant. At last he had an inspiration. Though he didn't speak French, he had read about the famous play that had just been produced at the Comédie Française, and raising his voice and addressing me as though I were stone deaf, he roared, "Chanteclerc molodoi!"² and then at

¹ Chicken.

² Young Chanticleer.

last I realized that he wanted to know if I thought she would like some spring chicken!

After dinner I again went on deck and stayed there till the small hours. It was an exquisite night. A party of Russian students on board, boys and girls, sang songs in chorus. Their voices were young and fresh, and there was something about that impromptu concert at sea, beneath the stars, that reminded me of my own youth. On the waves of their singing it seemed to me as if I were floating back to some enchanting, vaguely remembered region where it would still be possible for wonderful things to happen—those wonderful things that can be summed up in one word—happiness.

Many years later when, after the Great War, I was living in Rome, I translated one of Tourgueneff's little prose poems in which he describes a dream journey to a region of light and youth and happiness; he is travelling in a flower-decked boat across a vast blue sea whose waves are tipped with gold, for the sun, in all its glory, is shining on the waters, and he is accompanied by a number of other youths, as young and lighthearted as himself. They sail past magical, half transparent islands, the air is filled with the delicious smell of flowers, iridescent birds circle round them, and suddenly the soft, sweet voices of women are heard. And the heavens and the sea and the murmur of the waves all speak of love, happy love. And the beloved of each one's heart is near him, although invisible, and she is smiling, her eyes are shining; one moment more, and clasping his hand she will lead him into Paradise.

I never think of that little prose poem without remembering those Russian boys and girls, gathered together at the far end of the boat, and singing happily as they travelled homeward.

One other prose poem made a real impression on me. It is called "The Feast of the Supreme Being," and describes a wonderful reception given by the Almighty

to the Virtues. A great many were present, but only women had been invited. The lesser virtues were more agreeable and more lovable than the great ones, and got on capitally together. But suddenly the Almighty noticed two beautiful women who didn't seem to know each other. Taking one of them by the hand, He led her to the other. "Charity," He said, pointing to the first; "Gratitude," He added, indicating the second. Both Virtues were astounded. Since the world began—and that was a long time ago—it was the first time they had ever met.

I read somewhere that a famous historical personage had once said that gratitude was a *bourgeois* virtue, inconsistent with the dignity of a really distinguished person. I'm thankful to say I know a good many *bourgeois*.

We reached Sotchi in the afternoon. In front of the pleasant little hotel where we spent the night, a broad and lovely terrace faced the sea that lay before us like an immense sheet of liquid silver. We dined on that terrace, where great vases containing semi-tropical plants stood at intervals on solid blocks of grey stone that divided its graceful little columns from one another. Behind the hotel was a small park, where we strolled before turning in for the night. When I heard that a beautiful road ran through the mountains that edge the coast, and that we were to drive along that road to Gagri, the loveliest spot in the Caucasus, I went to bed feeling that life was indeed worth living.

We started quite early next morning. Within a few minutes of Sotchi we passed some gay little country houses situated on the mountain-side, but we soon left them behind and were in the depths of the real forest, driving beneath the shade of the splendid old trees that sheltered us from the sun. The weather was superb, and the Black Sea, which at that time of the year is as blue as the Ionian, was sparkling and glittering below like a hundred thousand million

diamonds. Suddenly the driver turned to me, pointing to some telegraph poles. "The telegrams you send from England to India pass along those wires," he said.

The forest was so lovely, the air so balmy, the glimpses of the sea shimmering between the branches of the trees were so fairylike, that I would willingly have prolonged that drive far into the night, though I knew that the best was yet to come. Just before we reached Gagri we met a gay riding party of Russians. Tourists—both European and American—were conspicuous by their absence. I never came across one during the whole course of our trip. One of the great charms of the Caucasus is its remoteness from the usual sphere of travel, and that "far-away" feeling that steals over the rare visitor from Western Europe is full of enchantment. I felt almost guilty when I realized that in my own person I represented that *magnum opus* of Thomas Cook & Son—the British Tourist—and that I was the only blot on the landscape. For if there is one thing that it is perfectly useless to deny, it is the fact that every Russian and every inhabitant of the Caucasus that I met, of necessity "*came across*" me.

Gagri was the private property of the Duke of Oldenburg, a relative of the late Tsar. The place was dominated by a fantastic little castle in which he sometimes spent the summer months; built on a spur of one of the mountains, seen from a certain angle it appeared to be almost hanging in mid-air. A cannon stood on the little pier opposite the castle, and we were told that it had been placed there by order of the Duke because on one occasion, when the sea was so rough that it was thought too dangerous for steamers to land, he and his household had been obliged to go without their usual meals for several days, as the greater part of their provisions were brought to Gagri by sea; the repetition of such a catastrophe was not to be contemplated, and the purveyors of food to the Royal

Household were informed that if, in future, they failed to get the better of the elements, they would have a broadside poured into their boat. I don't know if this ever actually took place, but there stood the cannon—a visible, if silent, witness to the fact that the threat had been made in sober earnest.

The hotel, which I believe was also built by this autocrat, consisted of a group of charming little houses of the *châlet* type, with balconies outside each window; every room faced the sea. Simple and unpretentious from outside, with slanting roofs, these *châlets* were quite in harmony with the landscape. One of them was entirely devoted to bedrooms, beautifully furnished, extremely comfortable, with luxurious bathrooms attached. In an adjoining *châlet*, at a delightful and spacious restaurant on the first floor, food and service both proved excellent. The other *châlets*, I imagine, were reserved for the staff; some may have contained sitting-rooms, but I didn't see them. During our short stay we lived in the open air from morning till night except when we entered the restaurant for meals.

With the exception of the space occupied by the castle, the *châlets* and the lovely little piazza, where Circassian drivers in picturesque national dress stood alongside the tiny carriages in which visitors were driven down to the pretty *Établissement des Bains*, on the shore, about a mile away, the whole of Gagri consists of a garden and nothing else, and, like *Zuleika*, in the Oriental poem that Anton Rubinstein has set to music and which finishes on a rhapsodical phrase, so mindful of the East, it is unique, and can only be compared to itself. It has been made on the waving ground that sometimes slopes down to the sea and sometimes rises towards the splendid range of densely wooded mountains in the rear, and is so divinely beautiful that thoughts of the Garden of Eden, and the early morning of a world that knew neither sin nor sorrow, inevitably rise to the mind.

It is like a garden that has taken shape in the opalescent clouds during some exquisite sunset and been reflected on earth—like a dream begun in heaven and fulfilled beneath the palms and cypresses of this God-blessed region. It is impossible to exaggerate its beauty or the extraordinary spell to which one succumbs as one wanders along, discovering fresh beauties at every turn. A winding path of dazzling whiteness between green lawns and brush palms whose feathery leaves spread themselves over thousands of flowers, extends from one end of the garden to the other, and as it rises gently in the direction of the mountains, it looks as though it well might lead to the fabled land of Heart's Desire. The vegetation is so luxurious that it suggests a jungle, but one in which the lamb might safely lie down with the lion.

Skirting the shore is an avenue of beautiful trees whose topmost branches form a green roof; inside this avenue it is always dark and cool, no matter what the temperature may be outside.

Standing quite alone, beneath the shadow of the mountains, is a beautiful little Coptic church in perfect condition, dating from the fourth century.

Valérie Balfour, who was as impressed by the beauty of Gagri as I was, said to me one day: "The whole place is like the dream of an aristocrat translated into reality."

But the garden was like the dream of a poet—one of God's aristocracy—translated into a marvel of unforgettable loveliness.

I don't know if it still exists. I was told that it had been destroyed by the Bolsheviks.

I would willingly have stayed in Gagri for months, but there were still places of great interest to be seen, and our time was limited. The celebrated Monastery of Novo Afon was within a two or three hours' motor drive, and we decided to visit it before going on—by sea—to Batoum on our way to Tiflis. We set out

for our new destination rather late in the afternoon. While we were driving across an immense valley I saw a sight that transported me in one second to the old pagan world of fauns and satyrs. For some time there had been no sign of any human habitation; no living being had crossed our path, no flocks of sheep, no herds of grazing cattle—nothing—it was as if Humanity had deserted the earth and left it as it was before the creation of man. And then, standing on a hillock in the far distance, I suddenly saw what looked like a centaur, standing motionless as a bronze statue. The illusion was complete. The man on horseback who had appeared so unexpectedly from behind a hillock—almost as if he had risen out of the ground—was wearing the national Circassian dress, and the long voluminous cloak that completely covered himself and his horse gave him the appearance of that curious mythological creature. It was really startling. The centaur perhaps owed his being centuries ago to some simple, imaginative inhabitant of the mountains who had seen in the far-away valley exactly what I saw that afternoon.

That evening we dined at the guest-house of the monastery and spent the night there. Strangers were received free of charge, but naturally everyone made some offering of money to the monks who looked after the poor for miles around. The next day, Sunday, the weather again was ideal. The monastery, a snowy-white, immense and picturesque building on the mountain-side, seemed like a palace in a fairy-tale illustrated by Edmund Dulac; it commanded a splendid view of the sea. An avenue of gigantic cypresses led up to the entrance of the church, an imposing building surmounted by the usual cupolas that give Russian churches so Eastern an appearance. The surrounding garden was full of magnolia trees in blossom. As I didn't understand the rites of the Greek Orthodox Church, and consequently was not able to follow the service, I sat alone outside under

one of the magnolia trees with my own Prayer Book; and as I read the opening psalm which at the beginning of Mass the priest says at the foot of the altar, and came to the verse, "And I will go unto the altar of God, to God who giveth joy to my youth . . ." I realized to the full the immense share of joy that had been granted to me, who loved beauty so passionately in all its manifestations, and who have been enabled to enjoy so often what so many people die without having seen. Although it is nineteen years ago since I was in the Caucasus, I never read that verse without remembering what I felt as I sat under that magnolia tree.

After the service we were shown over the church, and then one of the monks took us to see the immense dining-room, where a great number of people were having dinner, and where as many as a hundred poor people were sometimes fed during the course of the day. That afternoon I saw a touching sight. An elderly moujik was clinging affectionately to the arm of one of the monks as they walked along, looking up at him with such childlike confidence that only a cynic could have doubted that the two were in sympathy. No wonder the poor were fond of those monks. No one was ever turned away from their hospitable gates; they were their real and trusted friends.

But the Bolshevists have put an end to all that. And what have they given those poor people in exchange?

The steamer for Batoum was leaving Novo Afon that same evening. Someone who looked like a lay brother and several other passengers were on the little boat that took us to the steamer which was lying off the shore. The lay brother entered into conversation with Valérie, evidently trying to extract some information from her. She seemed to be amused and was laughing.

At last I became curious and said: "Do tell me what you two are talking about."

"We are talking about you; he is fully persuaded that you are me and that I am you—that I can't be 'Mrs.' Balfour because I'm Russian, and that it is *you* who are Mrs. Balfour, because you're English. What's more, he thinks you are the wife of the gentleman he calls 'Ministère Balfour.'"

I couldn't help laughing. He had received information on this subject that certainly had never reached the ears of either Ministère Balfour or myself, though we had been acquainted for several decades.

By this time the boat was behaving so badly that I was on the verge of sea-sickness; my laughter had taken another direction, and was on the wrong side of my mouth.

We arrived at Batoum on the afternoon of the next day. The hotel we stayed at was a nightmare, and the coffee was worse still. It was served with the corpses of innumerable flies at the bottom of each cup.

There certainly are some things one can't swallow!

How reluctantly we spent the night in this awful place may be easily imagined. It is true that running water was laid on in the bedrooms, but you can have too much even of that very good thing, for the wash-hand stands were in such a decrepit condition that there wasn't even a stopper attached to the chain that dangled over the basin, into which the water ceaselessly flowed without staying there for one second. As this was by no means my first experience of a similar state of affairs, I determined to add a large cork to the contents of my travelling bag.

The journey to Tiflis was long, but the carriage in which we travelled was so comfortable that we felt no fatigue. We halted at a good many stations; at most of them there were children with prettily arranged baskets of wild strawberries for sale. But there was

nothing arresting in the scenery of the country; it was very different from that of the lovely coast we had just left, and as far as I remember, the train ran for many hours through a vast plain.

It was evening when we reached Tiflis, where we put up at a very satisfactory hotel, run by a German, in the European part of the town. Next morning we went out to explore. In the centre of a large square stood the statue of Prince Vorontzoff, the distinguished Russian general who, in his youth, spent some years in England, and was related to the Pembroke family; he fought in the Crimean War when Sydney Herbert, whose mother was a Vorontzoff, was Minister of War in England.

Tiflis itself did not strike me as particularly interesting; it was not in the least like what I had imagined, and resembled any other European city with wide streets and excellent shops. But its situation was strange and impressive. There was something ruthless about the barren mountains, the naked rocks that stood like cruel sentinels outside the town, and suggested some terrible upheaval of Nature in centuries long past. That afternoon, as we stood on a slight eminence in some public gardens where a few Armenian women, in national dress, were strolling about, I couldn't help thinking that in spite of its modern aspect, Tiflis looked like a trap from which it would not be easy to escape in case of danger.

That evening we dined in the garden of a large café. The heat had been overpowering during the day, and towards evening the whole world seemed on fire, so incessant was the sheet lightning. I felt rather nervous at the idea of dining beneath the trees of the shady garden that had been described to us by our Russian cicerone, but as no one else seemed to object I concluded there was nothing to be alarmed at.

When we arrived after a drive of about half a mile, we found the garden full of people seated at little

tables; at one end, on a platform, a man who looked like an Arab was seated on his haunches singing. I had been told that there was to be a concert of Arab music and had provided myself with some music paper, as I thought it might be interesting to write down what I heard. But, like all Eastern music, it was quite impossible to get hold of accurately, and I was only able to dot down some strange intervals and effects that I made use of later on. Anything more hysterical than the singing of that man cannot be conceived. I love the wild, barbaric music of the East, but that night it was too much, even for me!

Tiflis is full of Armenians, and that evening my mind persisted in dwelling on all the massacres I had ever heard of, as I listened to him shrieking as though he were being attacked by a hostile crowd armed with red-hot pokers, and watched him swaying to and fro like a lunatic who would presently leap from the platform and hurl himself into our midst. He had worked himself up into such a frenzy that I thought he must be singing about some frightful tragedy—probably the flaying alive of the inhabitants of an entire city, who had been dragged from their beds and hot bottles in the dead of night. I said as much to Valérie, who didn't agree with me in the least.

"Don't you believe it," she said. "In all probability it is merely *his* way of asking for another cup of coffee."

I listened meekly to this explanation. Perhaps she was right. Men are very much alike in some respects, and she had all the accumulated experience of a woman who had been married for years to the eldest son of the redoubtable Macfiend.¹

Fortunately for us, he did not hold the floor during the entire evening. A little orchestra consisting of a

¹ With affectionate apologies to dear Monty, the kindest of kind hosts.

guitar, a tchianour, a tambourine, and a pretty pair of tiny painted drums, performed some really attractive native music of a very different sort. The tone of the tchianour, a little instrument I had never heard before, is enchanting; there is a seductive charm about it that completely fascinated me. It is a narrow stringed instrument, like a large inverted bowl with a long handle. I think it has three strings; it is played in 'cello position, with a slightly arched bow, but it rests on the knee of the player, not on the ground as with the 'cello. Some of the haunting and delicate melodies in the first and second numbers of Rimsky Korsakoff's *Scheherazade* would sound exquisite on the tchianour.

Next morning we paid a visit to the bazaar in the Armenian quarter; it was not as characteristic of the East as those of Constantinople or Cairo, and I was rather disappointed till I suddenly caught sight of a tiny shop where some curious-looking musical instruments were lying about. Among them was a tchianour. We were on our way to a celebrated carpet merchant, but I couldn't make up my mind to go on with the rest; if I stayed where I was I might have a chance of hearing it once more. And the next moment a dark-eyed Armenian came to the door. I pointed to the tchianour, and in very halting Russian tried to tell him how I loved it. And then for a quarter of an hour or so he played little snatches of strange, exotic melodies, and those delicious fragments were like the petals of damask roses changed by an enchanter's wand into music.

What magic there is in certain sounds, that in one second can transport those that love them into the land of dreams!

We were to return home by the celebrated Georgian Military Road that runs from within a few miles of Tiflis, to within an hour or so of Vladikafkaz. The road itself is a miracle of engineering. It is just

wide enough to allow of two motor-cars to pass each other, and has been hewn through gigantic and savage rocks that tower above it on one side and sink below it to immense depths on the other. The River Terek rushes madly over great boulders, between the rocks and the tremendous mountains.

That day I learned a new Russian word. At almost every turn of the road someone cried: "Vielikoliepnii! Vielikoliepnii!"¹

You drive along the winding road, steadily mounting higher and higher, and range upon range of mountains appear on which the snow lies eternally. As we passed the "Tchertovii Varota," which means "The Devil's Gate," the driver of the motor diligence in which we were travelling with several other Russians (all men, with the exception of a boy of about twelve), told us that on this spot, several years ago, there had been a frightful accident. A carriage and its occupants had fallen into the abyss thousands of feet below, owing to the reckless driving of the coachman, who was tipsy. One man alone was saved; he had thrown himself out on the side of the rock just before the others had met with their terrible death. A low wall now protects this dangerous part of the road.

Descending from the great heights, we halted for half an hour at a rest-house opposite the famous Kasbek Mountain, where we had a nondescript meal, luncheon and tea combined, which consisted chiefly of trout caught in the River Terek close by.

About four o'clock we continued our journey, now driving alongside the foaming river. At every moment there was a hairpin turn in the narrow road, and suddenly it grew quite dark, as though night had fallen; the mountains were closing round us to such an extent that they almost blotted out the daylight. The effect was uncanny, as though some disaster were impending. Just then I caught the

¹ "Magnificent! Magnificent!"

words, "Zamok Tamarii" (Tamara's Castle). A man had risen from his seat just behind me and was pointing to a ruin high up on the side of a great crag divided from the next mountain by a narrow gorge. This ruin, which in the first century A.D. was a castle belonging to one of the Kings of Persia, is now associated, not with the famous Queen Tamara who reigned centuries ago in the Kasbek district, but with the legendary and marvellously beautiful sorceress of the same name, the Lorelei of the East, who lured unwary travellers to their destruction. For men were unable to resist her beauty and her matchless seduction when she beckoned to them from the ramparts of her castle and invited them to enter. But no lover was able to satisfy her, and each in succession paid dearly for his brief hour of delight. The end was always the same. Summoning her bodyguard, she would bid them seize the unhappy man and hurl him into the torrent below.

When I arrived in London about a fortnight after this wonderful drive, I was asked to go with some friends to see (and hear) Borodine's ballet, *Tamara*. Anna Pavlova, in the rôle of Tamara, was dancing it to perfection. I almost felt as if I were back in the wild Darial Pass, as I watched her beckoning to another traveller, just before the fall of the curtain, and just after the first lover had been done to death. It seemed so strange to have seen with my own eyes the savage mountains and the swiftly flowing river that were supposed to be just beyond the stage!

I had promised my sister to meet her in London early in July, but this was impossible, for on the through train to Paris which started from Teheran, there was not a single seat to be had; I therefore remained another week at Usovskia. During that week a series of ballets was given in the little town by some extremely good dancers. I had never been to

a Russian ballet and was so delighted with what I saw that I thought I'd try and write one myself. The ballet I composed is called *The Enchanted Heart*, and I wrote the little folk-song—the music of the legend with which the ballet begins and ends—while I was staying with my two dear friends in Russia.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ONE or two stories suggested themselves to me to which I might write the music of the ballet I was contemplating, but they were not very satisfactory, and after a while I wrote a fairy-tale which I thought might suit the purpose, composing the greater part of the music during the autumn and winter I was in England. I stayed for some time in London with a very kind friend, Miss Josephine Sullivan, a daughter of the great Irish patriot, Edward Sullivan. She let me have a large quiet room at her flat in Drayton Gardens, where I was able to work in perfect peace and comfort. This room was only available for a certain number of weeks, as she had promised it to another friend before she knew I was coming to London, but with characteristic kindness she set herself to look for other rooms for me, and found them in Alexander Square, close to the Brompton Oratory, where I settled down to hard work for the whole winter and the following spring. The principal dances of the ballet were all ready by the summer of 1913, though some of the music that linked them together had not been orchestrated. The pianoforte edition, however, was complete when I returned to Villa Nuti in the autumn.

That winter, as usual, I went to Taormina for some weeks. Towards the end of my stay there I received a letter from Lady Rodd, our Ambassadress in Rome, with whom at that time I was only very slightly acquainted. In it she said that she had heard from friends of hers—and mine—that I had written a ballet, and that she would very much like to hear it, as she wished to give something of the sort at an entertainment that was to take place at the Embassy

that spring. Someone must have told her that I was returning to Florence in a few days, for she asked me if I would mind breaking my journey in Rome to talk things over. I wrote and said I would do so with the greatest pleasure; though of course for a private performance the original score would have to be arranged for a limited number of performers. I was not prepared to do this myself as I had a good deal of work on hand at that moment, and was also writing a book called *Friends and Memories* at the request of Mr. Edward Arnold, who wished to print it in the following autumn. During my little interview with Lady Rodd she solved the matter by telling me that if I would lend her the full score of my ballet she would ask Professor Tartaglia to undertake the task of arranging it for the small orchestra he usually conducted when music was required at the Embassy. A few additional players would be needed, but that was all. Professor Tartaglia was an admirable musician, and I was delighted with the clever way he reduced my score.

Lady Rodd was an enthusiastic lover of all things dramatic, and often gave delightful performances at the pretty theatre that had been permanently set up in the great ballroom at the Embassy. It was decided that the little *Corps de Ballet* should consist for the most part of her own children, and of other children whose fathers were accredited to various embassies in Rome. Lady Rodd's children had real talent; they had been beautifully taught, though I don't think they had at that time begun to study with the great Italian, Signor Cecchoni, who taught so many of the leading stars of the famous Russian Ballet: Madame Pavlova, Madame Karsavina, Madame Lopokova, etc. On this occasion a clever and sympathetic Danish dancer—a lady—was engaged to coach the children. I thought the way she accomplished her task was not only eminently satisfactory but very original. She held a copy of my fairy-tale in her hand and read it

to them again and again, as they practised their parts; she never rested till the little dancers had associated themselves, to the best of their abilities, with the characters they were representing, and had succeeded in expressing the different emotions by which they were swayed. Lady Rodd's eldest daughter, Evelyn, just sixteen and very graceful, took the part of the little princess in the story, and I only hope that if my ballet is ever publicly produced it may be my good fortune to have a dancer who will give the rôle the same sympathetic and lovable interpretation.

I went to Rome every now and again and stayed at the Embassy while the rehearsals were going on, and well remember my dismay when on arriving from Florence one day the nice English footman who opened the door said in a distressed tone of voice: "Oh, Miss White, I can't think whatever is happening to your music! There's a regular row going on in the ballroom; they all seem to be fighting over it." I immediately concluded that the particular number they were rehearsing had sounded so appalling that no member of the orchestra would have anything more to do with it; my heart really sank within me.

But when I entered the room in which pandemonium seemed to have been let loose, Professor Tartaglia, who was conducting, came forward and greeted me so kindly that I saw nothing was wrong; they had merely been discussing in characteristic Italian fashion (with which the English footman was apparently not acquainted) the way certain movements were to be taken. I was reminded of a similar uproar that once took place at my cottage in Taormina. When I asked for an explanation, my old cook, Catina, informed me that Giovannino and Provvidenza (my maid) were merely discussing the Creation of the World. "Both have different opinions," she added; "*gridono perché non sono d'accordo!*"¹

¹ "They scream because they can't agree."

With regard to my ballet music everyone had a different opinion, and, as far as I could make out, no one thought that the conductor's opinion was of the slightest importance until it was found that it entirely coincided with my own, when peace was restored; though I am bound to confess that during a pause one of the performers whispered in my ear that "l'oboe e proprio una bestia!" But if that was indeed the case I must say the mark of the beast was imprinted so lightly upon him that I was quite unable to detect it.

When the day of the dress-rehearsal arrived everything went swimmingly and all were in the best of tempers. The first violin, a clever young Jew who was a member of the great orchestra of the Augusteo where Signor Toscanini often conducted, threw himself heart and soul into the spirit of the music. It was really a joy to discuss things with him. Once when I said to him, referring to a certain phrase, "Just play it as if you were drunk with excitement and delight," I was really startled by the fire, the tremendous *joie de vivre* he poured into it; as long as I live I shall never hear that rendering improved upon. Those are the moments when a composer really does feel rewarded for all the toil involved in writing even a very unpretentious orchestral work such as my ballet undoubtedly is; but when one is a novice at the work, as I am, in spite of all the years that have passed over my head, I can only say that to hear a cherished phrase "come off" really satisfactorily—just as one has imagined it—is to know a moment of sheer, unmitigated delight.

The following is, more or less, the scenario of *The Enchanted Heart*.

The hero and heroine are Prince Ferdusi, a Persian prince, and Princess Jasmine, a little Russian princess.

One evening she meets the peasants who have been working in a clearing in the great forest that

surrounds the castle where she lives with her parents. They are about to go home; she asks them why they are leaving so early; they reply that they are afraid to stay there after dark and tell her the following story.

The heart of a Persian prince has been stolen from him by a wicked magician jealous of his beauty and the love given to him by his people; he has changed the heart into a firefly and has imprisoned the prince and his attendants in a subterranean palace in the forest. Being heartless, he now is cold and selfish. Although he would like to keep the prince for ever underground, the magician's power has certain limits. From the night that the first fireflies are seen till they disappear, he is obliged to allow the prince and his attendants to roam about the forest for one hour before midnight, where the prince sees, without recognizing it, his poor, enchanted heart flitting restlessly and disconsolately through the air with myriads of other fireflies. No one knows which is the enchanted heart, except the elves and fairies who dwell in the forest, and who are never seen by mortal men till the fireflies appear, and who vanish when they disappear.

There is a universal belief among the peasants that should it come in contact with any human being, he would immediately lose his life, and it is for this reason that during this period they are afraid of remaining in the forest after dark.

But there is a legend that somewhere in the world exists a lovely princess who is destined to love the prince, and her love will be stronger than the magician's power, for she will go alone into the forest, to try and capture the enchanted heart, and she will risk her own life in order to restore it. Of all the fireflies it is the only one whose light will not be extinguished when she grasps it in her hand. But she must capture it before the last stroke of midnight, otherwise she will perish and the prince will remain captive for ever. He will fall in love with her the

moment he sees her, and will endeavour to drag her down to his subterranean palace before she has captured his heart; but she will resist him because she loves him and wants to save him. And when she has given him back his heart the magician will have no more power over him. And a miracle will happen. The sun will rise at midnight as a token that the spell is broken and everyone will give thanks to Almighty God.

The old hermit who lives in a cell near the chapel attached to the castle prays every night that this miracle may happen before his death.

Although at first she laughs at the peasants' story, she is fascinated by it, and gradually the belief enters her heart that she herself is the princess destined to save the prince and to prove that the legend is true.

At the dress-rehearsal given by the children there was an unmistakable atmosphere of real poetry, of real romance, felt by many others beside myself. The scenic effects and costumes were perfectly charming. No trouble and no expense had been spared over this production. Before each scene Signor Formili, the well-known painter and architect who had painted the scenery, read aloud that portion of the fairy story to be represented. Among the numerous guests who came to the rehearsal was an old French abbé; I happened to be standing next him when the curtain fell on the kneeling peasants surrounding the little princess and the young prince kneeling at her feet, while the sun rose behind the trees and the dark woods were gradually flooded with light.

"Can you tell me," he said, "who wrote this ballet?"

I told him that I had.

"Eh bien," he said, "cela m'a fait pleurer."

And I feel inclined to cry myself when I think of that touching tribute to my little ballet.

The dress-rehearsal was on a Saturday afternoon,

and the actual performance, to which a great many guests had been invited, was to be given on the following Monday. But on the Sunday Sir Rennell Rodd received a telegram announcing the death of the Duke of Argyll, in consequence of which no entertainment could be allowed to take place at the British Embassy, as the Royal Family were in mourning.

This was a very great disappointment to everyone concerned; the children were so dreadfully disappointed and their father was so sorry for them and their little friends that he telegraphed to London to ask whether an exception might not be made as this performance was entirely a children's affair. The permission, however, was refused.

One of Sir Rennell's little boys, who had taken the part of an elf in the ballet, assured us that in old Roman days certain feasts were given in connection with funerals.

"Why can't you telegraph again," he said to his father, "and tell them that we're only having a funeral feast with Miss White's music? Perhaps they'd let us do it then."

We had a good laugh over this highly original suggestion, but his father thought it was just possible that it might not be quite as much appreciated by the authorities in London as it most undoubtedly was by us. Personally I didn't feel too disappointed, as the dress-rehearsal had gone so beautifully that I now knew how the music sounded and the exact effect produced by the dancing and the story itself; but I felt very sorry indeed for the children, who had taken so much trouble to learn their parts, and who were looking forward so eagerly to the performance; and I was really distressed at the idea of all the expense that had been incurred—in vain—by my kind friends. Before I returned to Florence Sir Rennell and Lady Rodd told me that they would give another performance of my ballet towards Christmas; "and we will invite all Rome to come and see it," they added.

I don't think it is possible for two people to have been kinder during all those weeks than Sir Rennell and Lady Rodd were to me. I became very much attached to them both and shall always remain so. I shall never forget the opportunity that dear Lady Rodd gave me and the whole-hearted generous way it was given. Gratitude is a link that isn't easily broken.

But there was no performance of my ballet that Christmas and for many Christmases to come. That dress-rehearsal had taken place in 1914.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

OF all the many well-known people with whom I came in contact during the war, the late Sir Frederick Milner impressed me most. He was a splendid man. He had a passionate love of justice; to right a wrong he would, and indeed he *did*, work himself to death. His championship of the disabled ex-service men is so well known that there is no need for me to enlarge upon it. What impressed me most of all was his indomitable, indestructible pluck, the dogged perseverance with which he pursued what had become the object of his life. It was impossible to stem the tide of his energy where the welfare of the wounded men was at stake, and had anyone attempted to do so he would soon have found out that he was up against a rock. Anyone less afraid of public opinion or adverse personal criticism it is impossible to conceive. And he had another beautiful characteristic: he was incapable of disappointing anyone who trusted him. A hospital nurse once told me that he had travelled all the way back from Scotland, where he had gone for a much needed rest, because for some days a badly wounded man in one of his homes had whispered several times, "I want to speak to Sir Frederick. I want to tell him something." The nurse, who knew how much he cared individually for each man, wrote to him, and he immediately returned to London.

I saw a good deal of him, as I organized some concerts for "The Lord Roberts Memorial Fund for Workshops for Disabled Soldiers and Sailors," of which he was the Honorary Treasurer. In this work I was assisted by almost every artist I knew, and in a very short time we were able

to hand him over a thousand pounds. He was grateful as few human beings know how to be; the value he put on the slightest attempt to help him in his work was so lovable that it touched one to tears, and when one realizes that this work was accomplished by a man who was at least sixty-four when war broke out, who was even then suffering from extreme deafness, and whose eyesight was rapidly failing, the good he did by the sheer force of his warm heart and unconquerable will is astonishing. He was absolutely disinterested. That was his secret. I am perfectly certain this quality endows both men and women with a strength that enables them to triumph over every obstacle. I believe, as I believe in God, that absolute disinterestedness in a great cause has the germs of life within it, that it is bound to bring forth great results, to accomplish miracles. But let one touch of self-interest creep in and it is followed by a sort of blight that ruins everything.

The saying, "There is a limit to everything," may be true in some cases, but there was no limit to his charity, to his tender compassion for the wounded men; no limit to his untiring efforts on behalf of the poor fellows who have lost the best friend they ever had, or are ever likely to have.

One day he took me with him to visit one of the convalescent homes he had founded, a large, cheerful house, charmingly furnished, with a garden, where the men were able to sit under the trees in fine weather. Sir Frederick told me of cases where shell-shocked men, who had become temporarily insane, had been sent to lunatic asylums where there was every chance of their becoming totally insane; whereas in many similar cases after two or three months of treatment in one of the homes he had established, where the whole atmosphere was so different from that of a madhouse, they had completely recovered. One poor boy, who was being wheeled about in an invalid chair, said to me: "I wish I could live here

for ever." Another lad who had had both his legs amputated, had just received his wooden pair, and was laughing gaily as he tried to jump about on them.

Sometimes Sir Frederick, at my request, came and made a little speech during the intervals of our "Lord Roberts" concerts, and one sentence of his will live in my memory for ever.

"Don't forget these brave fellows when they are once again in plain clothes. Don't forget what they have done for us, when they are out of their blue hospital uniforms."

But how few of us have a memory like his!

During the spring of 1916, while I was living in Brighton for a short time, I was invited to a dinner-party at Downing Street; Mr. Asquith was still Prime Minister. I sat next to Lord Kitchener. It was only a few weeks before he was drowned. When I was introduced to him before dinner, he was the only man in the room, with Mrs. Asquith and Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton. I was spending the night at Downing Street, but hadn't yet seen my hostess. Both she and Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton were very old friends, and to their kind and affectionate greeting when I came into the room I naturally responded with equal warmth. Lord Kitchener was still smiling—and he had a very kind smile—over our mutual embraces when I was introduced to him. I liked him on the spot. I had felt very nervous when I was told that I was to sit next to him at dinner, but I never gave another thought to all that I had been told about his unapproachableness and his sternness, from the moment we shook hands. I found him perfectly easy to get on with, and though he was no great talker, we touched on every sort of subject; he was perfectly simple, there wasn't a trace of the "great man" attitude about him—in fact my left-hand neighbour, Mr. Harry Cust, had said to me: "Talk to him just exactly as you would to anyone else; that is what he

prefers." Mr. Cust, whom I had known long ago, but hadn't met for years, was brilliantly clever, and I considered myself very fortunate to be seated between two such men, utterly different though they were.

To Lord Kitchener I made some remark about Lord Roberts, whom I loved and admired though I didn't know him personally, and I remember the pleasure with which I heard him say, very gravely, after a short pause during which I wondered what he thought himself: "Lord Roberts was a *very great* man." I had heard Lord Roberts belittled in several quarters and had been indignant when he was attacked, but after that I felt it didn't much matter what anyone else said. And later on, when in his turn Kitchener was belittled and attacked, I remember thinking how extraordinary it was that the splendid services rendered by splendid men to their country in the hour of her terrible need were almost invariably forgotten, while the mistakes they made were as invariably remembered and brought up against them. Any pygmy who attacks a great man is listened to if the attack is only scurrilous enough, and there is always someone ready to say "there's something in it, you may be quite sure."

During the Great War one really did obtain an insight into human nature at its best, and at its worst, and one certainly could have measured the circumference of the globe with the red tape that existed in some quarters. While I am on this subject I should like to repeat part of a conversation at a luncheon-party at Downing Street at which I was present. Mrs. Asquith (as she was then) was at the foot of the table, Lord Grey of Falloden, then Sir Edward Grey, was on her right hand (also at the foot of the very broad table). Sir Edward Henry, who was, I believe, Head of the Police, was seated immediately opposite me. It was quite an informal party, and we were all four close together.

Suddenly Mrs. Asquith said: "I wonder what on

earth people will say about me next? I've just heard that I've been continually seen at the German camps, talking on friendliest terms with the prisoners; yet I've never been near one of these camps."

I remember perfectly well the answer made by Sir Edward Henry, who was certainly in a position to know whether she was speaking the truth or no.

"You mustn't pay any attention to the nonsense people talk, Mrs. Asquith. The only thing to do is to ignore it."

But again and again I heard her accused of the same thing, just as people swore repeatedly that they had themselves seen Russian troops that had landed in England, though such a thing never happened.

Another old friend who was wonderfully kind to me was Sir Eyre Crowe. I had known him ever since he was a boy of about twenty-one. On one occasion I wrote to him on behalf of some nuns who were very anxious to return to France, but who had not been able to obtain permission to do so. They had asked my cousin Dora, Lady Grayson, if she could help them in any way. They belonged to a teaching Order, and some of her little girls were at their convent. I was staying at the time at Lancaster Gate with my cousin, of whom I was extremely fond. She had a heart of gold, and never lost a chance of doing a kindness to anyone; in fact she almost wore herself out during the war helping those in need. The nuns were talking to her as I passed through the drawing-room one morning. "Oh, Maude," she said, "I wonder if you know anyone who could help them: they *must* return to France to the Mother House for one year, otherwise they won't be allowed to go on teaching."

Immediately I thought of Eyre Crowe, who was at the Foreign Office, and wrote to ask him if he could give me five minutes of his time for "auld lang syne." He answered at once and made an appoint-

ment, and I asked both the nuns to come with me and state their own case. When we were shown into his room I said to him: "Of course you quite understand that we've come here to try to convert you!"

"Have you?" he said, laughing. "Anyhow, I see you're as fond of pretty hats as you were in the old days when we first knew each other!"

After this very informal beginning I explained to him that the nuns (one of whom was English and the other French) had been unable to obtain their passports from the French Consulate. After he had entered fully into the matter with them he wrote immediately to Monsieur Thierry, First Secretary at the French Embassy, explaining their case and asking him as a personal favour to himself to do whatever he could. And then he spoke most kindly and encouragingly to them. "Soyez persuadée, ma sœur, qu'on fera pour vous tout ce qui est possible," were his last words to the French nun.

As we left the room she said to me: "I had always heard that there was nothing to beat the courtesy of an English gentleman. Now I know it."

I was always fond of Eyre Crowe from the time I met him at an evening party at the house of Mr. John Murray, the head of the famous firm in Albemarle Street. That evening when I congratulated him on the wonderful way he spoke English, he laughed and said: "But why shouldn't I? I'm an Englishman in spite of my German accent, which I can't help, as I was brought up from childhood in Germany." It was this slight German accent that started another of those absurd rumours that abounded during the war. Again and again I heard it said: "Isn't it incredible that they should give an important post at the Foreign Office to a man of German origin?" I remember his saying to me: "I knew the German character a good deal better than most of my colleagues, but there were certain things I could *never* make them realize, much

as I tried to open their eyes even before war broke out."

After we left the Foreign Office we went to the French Embassy. Monsieur Thierry was absent, but we were most kindly received by another secretary, who told the nuns that he would do everything that lay in his power to help them.

The nuns went home, and early next morning I went down to the country to help at a "Lord Roberts" concert. When I returned next day to Lancaster Gate I said to my cousin: "Do tell me if you have any news about the nuns?"

"They are in France," she said.

Monsieur Thierry, to whom Lady Dawkins had introduced me, did me one kindness which I shall remember as long as I live. My eldest brother, Colonel Fred White, who was in very delicate health, was anxious to return to his home in Nice. He had spent nearly all his life soldiering in India and was not able to stand the English climate. I told him how kind they had been to me about the nuns, and said to him: "Do let me see if Monsieur Thierry can't get you a *laissez-passer* to cross over to France without any difficulties." He was so ill (he died that year) that he said he would be only too thankful if they would give him one. I called on Monsieur Thierry, who told me that to his infinite regret, those *laissez-passer* were not being issued any more. I felt desperate and said: "My brother is ill, he is an old soldier; can no exception be made in his favour?" When he heard he was an old soldier and ill, Monsieur Thierry said to me: "Wait here a moment. I will go and speak to the Ambassador." When he returned it was with the *laissez-passer* for my dear, kind brother who was beloved by everyone who knew him.

During the Armistice Marion Terry said to me: "I hear you know Sir Eyre Crowe. Do ask him if he can do anything for my sister Ellen, who has been

trying in vain, for the last year, to get a trunk sent out to her son in Italy. It contains a lot of things that he needs very much." I felt sure there were very few men in England who would refuse to do anything for Ellen Terry, and of course I did as she asked me. After two or three days' silence I wrote and said: "How about Ellen Terry's trunk?" The answer came immediately, and was as laconic as my cousin's: "It's on the high seas!"

I met Sir Arthur Stanley, who was head of the Red Cross, at luncheon one day at Lady Dawkins' house in Chesham Place, and he also did me a great kindness. One of my cousins—Miss Amy Drummond-Hay—was very anxious to obtain work as a nurse in a hospital. When she applied for the post she had been asked how old she was. She had answered quite correctly, and was found to be just one year over the prescribed age. For this reason, though she was strong and fit, and an admirable nurse, having attended an invalid relative for years and years, she was turned down. She was very much distressed about it and I felt very sorry for her. I asked Sir Arthur if he could do anything about it. There was no red tape about him! "That's what happens when women *are* truthful!" he said, laughing. "It was a great mistake on her part to give her real age." But the "great mistake" must have appealed to him, for he enabled her to get a post as nurse at a hospital, where she worked for the whole duration of the war.

One of the first raids took place over London while I was living in a cottage in Broadway, in 1915. When the news reached us one of the village children said to me with withering contempt: "Yer'd think they'd 'ave something better to do, wouldn't yer?"

I had every reason to wish they *had* had something better to do, and this is why. Some weeks before the

raid I had received a post-card from Sir Henry Wood on which he wrote :

“DEAR MISS WHITE,—You will remember the Ballet Music you played us in Florence. Wouldn't it be possible to do some of it as an Orchestral Suite? If so, I wish you would reserve to me its first performance, and I would give it in August, September and October at my Promenade Concerts. Let me know how you like the idea.”

I need hardly say I was perfectly delighted. I chose three numbers I thought suitable, and had the orchestral parts copied at a good deal of expense. My disappointment can be imagined when, after the raid, I received a letter saying that it was thought advisable to postpone the performance of all new music for the present. In order to induce people to go to the concerts nothing but very well-known and popular music would be given.

This came after a previous disappointment earlier in the year. An extract from a very kind letter written to me by Madame Adeline Genée, the charming and well-known Danish dancer, speaks for itself.

“DEAR MISS WHITE,—I had submitted your delightful ballet, *The Enchanted Heart*, to the Coliseum Management as a likely production for my coming season there. Unfortunately they cannot—at the present moment at least—give it quite as fine a setting as, to my mind, it deserves, and have consequently returned it to my care . . .” etc.

After all these disappointments I came to the conclusion that I also must wait for the beautiful princess who was to break the spell of bad luck that keeps *The Enchanted Heart* in the prison of a suitcase in which the score reposes, and after a conversation last autumn with Madame Karsavina, and some of the charming and kind letters of her husband, Mr. Henry

Bruce, I am tempted to think that I really have had my first glimpse of Princess Jasmine!

I went to Italy for four months in June, 1916. I longed to see my sister, and had promised Giovannino that if he were called up I would come to see him. I was horribly nervous at the thought of the long crossing from Southampton to Havre after the loss of the *Hampshire*, for people thought and talked of nothing else for weeks. I remember my own horror on seeing the posters in the street for the first time with "Death of Lord Kitchener" in enormous letters. My cousin, Dora Grayson, and I were driving together when we first caught sight of them in Oxford Street. The excitement was tremendous; people refused to believe it at first; perfect strangers were talking to each other in the street with visible emotion. There was a rumour that Lord Kitchener had been saved, a rumour that persisted for weeks, but of course it wasn't true.

My journey to Italy was made as easy as possible. Sir Alex. Hood saw to that. He wrote to General Balfour at the General Embarkation Staff Office at Southampton, who was a friend of his, and asked him to do all he could to facilitate my journey. Sir Alex. sent me his answer, from which the following is an extract:

"Of course I shall be delighted to see that Miss Maude Valérie White is looked after and met both here and at Havre. All you have to do is kindly to let me know the day she is coming, and by what train. I will arrange the rest."

I crossed over with Lady (Tom) Bridges, who was going to meet her husband in Paris. We were very old friends. I hadn't been in my cabin for more than a few minutes when she looked in. "I've just heard that we have a Royalty on board," she said. "I wonder who it is."

I also wondered.

We were a good deal amused when it transpired that *I* was the *Royalty*, simply because someone—I can't imagine who—had spread a report that a letter had been received from Marlborough House requesting the General to look after a lady—a *Royalty* without the shadow of a doubt!

Sir Alex. happened to be at Marlborough House when he wrote to his friend asking him to do what he could for me, and the paper bore that address. But how comically truth gets mixed up sometimes with the wildest nonsense.

That crossing from Southampton to Havre was so strange. We were in perfect darkness and there was no sound of machinery. Everyone was so quiet and self-possessed that my own fears vanished from the minute I entered my cabin. I went to bed and never woke till the stewardess brought me a cup of tea!

I remained four months in Italy and spent nearly all the time at Villa Nuti, in Florence, where my sister and Miss Martindale, with other friends, used to go down on alternate days to nurse at one of the big hospitals. I stayed at Palestrina for some days with Giovannino, and on my return again stayed at the Embassy with the Rodds, who wouldn't hear of my putting up at an hotel. The heat was appalling and I had a breakdown. I shall never forget how kind Sir Rennell was. At nearly midnight he went out himself to get me some medicine sooner than disturb any of the servants.

I returned to London just in time for a raid. I was in eight raids as far as I remember, but I'm not going to write about them. I recall them with horror. Only once do I remember feeling inclined to laugh, though the occasion was pathetic enough, goodness knows. It was during the summer I spent near Church Street, Kensington, where I had taken a nice little flat at the top of a house. My landlady's

little boy, a dear, plucky little fellow about six years old, never shed a tear during the raids, though they were enough to frighten a child—or anyone else—to death, but one night when we were all in the basement together just after the Zeppelins were signalled I heard him say in a worried little old man's Cockney voice: "I do wish them Germans would come—*and géo!*"

During the war I often stayed with my cousin, Dora Grayson, at Lancaster Gate. The house was full of her many children, and their presence was a perfect Godsend during those miserable days. Their remarks sometimes made us laugh even in our saddest moments. Once at luncheon, Ambrose, one of the little boys, heard a guest say to his mother that a common friend of theirs was terribly upset by the death of a near relative. After a minute or two he said: "Is she upside down?"

He had a twin brother, Godfrey, and neither of them could bear to be separated from their mother. They followed her everywhere, and once stood persistently outside the bathroom where she was having her morning dip, clamouring to be let in. After being repeatedly refused admittance one of them asked sarcastically: "Anything vulgar going on?"

Now and again the children gave plays ("acts" they called them) to which we were invited. Stage directions were given audibly. One of them was: "Enter Mrs. Smith with her divorce."

When their mother said to them, "What on earth do you mean?" one of the twins said: "Well, isn't a divorce the same thing as a husband?"

And sometimes at these plays they danced what they announced as "little mignonettes" (minuets).

Genuine stories about children are often very amusing, but I only mention one more which was told me by the kind friend who typed these pages.

A small boy, with whose relatives she was acquainted, was consumed with a great longing to go to the same school as his elder brother—a hero of about eleven. He himself attended a Kindergarten. But at his brother's glorious school there were such heaps and heaps of big boys . . . and they all walked to school by themselves.

"But *you* also walk to school," said someone, endeavouring to console him.

"Yes," he said, "*I* walk to school, but most of our fellows come in prams!"

I gave concerts for every sort of war charity, and helped in innumerable others during the next two years.

Two of these concerts have remained in my memory. The first one was for the refugees from the Veneto, and Mrs. Cazelet kindly lent me her house in Grosvenor Square, which contained a large music-room on the first floor. A platform had been erected, and high above it, from one end to the other, was stretched a piece of white linen on which a friend of mine, Miss Maud Caffin, had painted the following words in large letters, at my request. They are taken from a tomb in the church of San Clemente in Rome.

"Piange la debolezza umana
Sorridente l'immortale speranza."

After the first part of the concert in which Madame Suggia was one of the performers, there was a slight pause. Then Mr. Bertram Binyon, who is half Italian himself, sang the well-known old Italian song "*Sole mio*." When he came to the words "*Ma un altro Sole sta n'fronte a te*," he turned round and finished the song facing Lady Mary Strickland, the lovely young daughter of the Earl of Wemyss, who, representing Venice, and dressed in a beautiful old Venetian dress, was walking slowly into the room

while Sir Horace Dorrien Smith's little boy, dressed as a page, walked backwards, escorting her to the platform; two little cousins of my own, dressed as gondoliers, in white suits and scarlet sashes, walked behind her. She was to recite the speech from the *Merchant of Venice*—"The quality of Mercy is not strained"—before the collection for the refugees was made.

Ellen Terry had coached her, and her daughter, Miss Craig, had attended to every detail of her costume. She looked like a living picture by Paul Veronese as she sat in the high-backed old Italian chair that had been lent to us for the occasion, surrounded by the children who stood motionless beside her while she made her speech. As she said the last words, a little choir, consisting of women's voices, sang the beautiful words painted on the linen just above them. I had set them to music, and Madame Emilia Conti led the choir. The words *Piange* and *Sorride* were repeated three times. She sat with her head bent while they chanted the first line. As they sang the first word of the second line (*Sorride*) she slightly raised her head; the second time they sang it she sat suddenly upright, as though she couldn't believe she had heard aright; but the third time when it was repeated on a note of triumph, she sprang from her chair, quickly gave her page and the little gondoliers some white silk bags, and pointed to the audience. The children leaped from the platform, and while the choir continued singing "*Sorride l'immortale speranza*," the audience poured, literally poured, money into their bags.

When the choir had finished those lines, they sang not only Venetian but Sicilian folk-songs, for on the program it had been announced that a certain portion of the money collected was to be given to the poor of Taormina. After the last folk-song I struck up the *Tarantella di Taormina*, a tarantella well known to more than one person in the audience who

had spent many a happy winter in that lovely spot; and at the sound of the first notes a young girl dressed quite simply like a Taorminese peasant in a cotton dress, with a lemon-coloured handkerchief tied over her hair, danced gaily into the room with a great spray of almond blossoms in one hand, and in the other a bowl shaped and coloured like an orange, in which she went round collecting.

Mr. Richard Bagot, the novelist, was in the audience, and after the concert helped me to count the money that had been collected. The greater part was sent to Sir Rennell Rodd, who handed it over to Queen Margherita to distribute as she thought best, while a smaller sum was sent to Giovannino to distribute among the neediest of his fellow-townsmen. I knew I could rely absolutely on him to do what was right.

The second concert was one got up for the Serbian Relief Fund, for which Mrs. Carrington Wilde worked for years with unflagging devotion. I was asked to organize the concert and arrange some Serbian dances for the orchestra. I then made up my mind to do things on a grand scale, and engaged the Queen's Hall Orchestra and the kind services of Sir Henry Wood. The hall itself was given to me rent-free. Some weeks before the date fixed for the concert, five Serbian dances were handed to me—tunes, scribbled on little bits of music-paper, with basses that were enough to make one's hair stand on end! But there was something wild and exciting about the tunes themselves that reminded me of the dances in Borodine's *Prince Igor*, and I thought it would be very interesting to try to orchestrate them. To my delight they sent to know what instruments I would require, and I asked them to give me a big orchestra consisting of: two flutes and a piccolo, two oboes and a Cor Anglais, two clarinets and a bass clarinet, two bassoons and a double bassoon, four horns, the usual brass and a tuba, a harp; all the strings available,

and all the percussion necessary to obtain certain barbaric effects.

The dances were to be performed by Serbian students in London and the students of the Bergman Osterbeg Physical Training College, under the direction of Miss Edith Clarke. They were all to wear the various national costumes of the southern Slav lands. The dances did really "come off" beautifully, and the way those students in their picturesque national dresses danced through the Queen's Hall and on to the platform (the orchestra had been placed in the hall itself for this occasion) was exhilarating and delightful beyond words.

As the whole arrangement of the concert was in my hands, I determined to have a selection from my ballet performed. It was written for a smaller orchestra than the Serbian dances, for at one time there had been an idea of Madame Pavlova producing it, and I had been asked to score it for the orchestra that always played for her. Those selections also "came off" really well, and Sir Henry Wood repeated them the following Sunday at both the afternoon and evening concerts. Madame Alvarez and Miss Adela Verne contributed solos, and that charming actress, the late Miss Marion Terry, recited "The Hymn of Serbia's Glory," translated by Lord Lytton, and wore a reproduction of the gorgeous Court dress of the Empress Militza of Serbia, who lived in the fourteenth century. This costume was kindly lent by Lady Whitehead. The National Anthem of Serbia preceded Marion Terry's appearance on the platform, and at the end of her recitation the Marseillaise was played, while soldiers and sailors held the flags of the Allied Nations over her. The war in Serbia was just over.

The collection amounted to over £100. The gallery had been crowded with poverty-stricken Serbians, and the amount of pennies in the various bags was enormous.

My dear sister and Miss Martindale had been

working hard in Rome during all this time. Clothes were being made at the British Embassy for the mine-sweepers, soldiers and sailors who were constantly passing through, and they went regularly to help. They also helped at the canteens, and my sister worked several days a week at a shop set up by Lady Rodd where things were sold for the benefit of the Italian wounded. It was there that she made friends with the present beautiful Italian Ambassadors in London, Donna Diano Bordonaro. At that time she was married to an Englishman, and my sister knew her as Donna Diana Piercey. She always spoke of her with affection and admiration. Both of them worked for some time at Lady Rodd's shop, and how delighted I was when I received a letter from the latter one day in which she said: "Your sister is a gem!"

Lady Rodd made an enormous sum of money for the Italian wounded; she was untiring in her efforts, and I remember well after my return to Rome in the autumn of 1919, the enthusiastic way in which both Sir Rennell and she were spoken of by an old cabman (an Italian of the old school) who drove me home from the farewell party given at the Embassy just before they left it for ever.

"Ah," he said to me, "Mr. Rennell è un gran galantuomo, e *quanto* non ha fatto la sua signora per i nostri mutilati!"

Before returning to Italy in the autumn of 1919, I was asked by my friend Valérie Balfour if I could do anything to raise some money for the British Russian Relief Committee that was working at the Russian Embassy in Chesham Street. Their funds were for the moment almost at an end. Valérie was working there herself; in fact she completely exhausted herself on behalf of her compatriots, and to my infinite sorrow died that autumn. I was so fond of her that I was only too anxious to help her in any way I could. I told her that I thought we would make far more

money by a ball than by a concert, and suggested giving one at the Hyde Park Hotel. When Lady Georgina Buchanan, who was on the General Council, heard what I was contemplating, she became quite nervous.

"I couldn't undertake such a responsibility," she said to Valérie, when she told her. "The expenses connected with such an entertainment would probably be enormous, and I daren't risk it in our present circumstances."

I hardly knew Lady Georgina then, but I asked Valérie to tell her that I would undertake the entire responsibility myself, and would ask every friend I had to help me to sell tickets. All I asked of Lady Georgina was that she should give her name as patroness, and that she, Sir George and Miss Meriel Buchanan should come to the ball. To this, of course, she willingly consented. And then Valérie and I "forged ahead!" I asked a smart young officer I knew to help me with the catering and the wines, engaged the big ballroom at the Hyde Park Hotel and a good band, and with the help of her friends and mine we sold a very great number of tickets.

My sister, who was staying at Lancaster Gate with me, gave me £20, and the Graysons themselves came *en masse* to the one and only ball I ever gave in my life. The tickets sold wonderfully well, and a few days after the ball I received a letter from Lady Georgina from which I quote the beginning:

"DEAR MISS WHITE,—Thank you a thousand times for the *splendid* cheque. I am indeed most grateful for all you have done. It will be such a help to me I hardly know how to thank you," etc.

After receiving a letter of this sort I have often thought with a pang of all those who *really* supplied the funds, without whom none of us who organized entertainments, etc., could have accom-

plished anything, and I've wished that their names could be known. This I know is impossible. Their real name is Legion, but I should like to take this opportunity of thanking from the bottom of my heart every individual member of that Legion who helped me in my endeavours, for they were friends in need who were friends indeed.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WE returned to Italy towards the end of August (1919), this time crossing in broad daylight from Dover to Calais. I sat on deck next to a Frenchwoman who told me she was going home for the first time since the outbreak of war. I asked her where she lived and she said, "In Lille." Miss Martindale was sitting just in front of us, and when I told this woman that her nephew had been with the pursuing army that had entered Lille, her eyes filled with tears. With a little sob she said: "Ah, les Anglais!" I've seldom heard so much feeling compressed into so few words. In a letter to his aunt, Captain Parry-Jones, who was aide-de-camp to General Birdwood, said: "It has been one of the rewards of this war to advance through . . . Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing, Ghent, Brussels, and for days and days to see nothing but happy and welcoming faces."

My sister and Miss Martindale were eventually going on to Rome, but the former insisted on making me a present of four weeks at the Villa d'Este on my beloved Lake Como, as I had entirely collapsed after the Russian ball and had been laid up for a month. Sometimes when I refer to my numerous breakdowns, I can't help thinking of the absurd story of the woman who owed her life to her monumental egotism. From her earliest childhood she had firmly refused to "give up" anything for anyone, and when at last she was laid low with cholera morbus she refused point-blank to "give up" the ghost, and to the dismay and horror of her relatives (she naturally had no friends) recovered completely.

So did I. Long mornings and evenings spent

rowing on the lake with a boatman soon restored me to health, to say nothing of all the hours of reading and resting under the shady trees of the lovely garden. There is something wonderfully soothing in the atmosphere of Lake Como, especially if one goes there before the fashionable crowd has taken possession of it, or after it has departed. While at the Villa d'Este I made friends with a Roumanian lady, Mademoiselle Zoe Arion, who was also staying there and of whom I saw a great deal when later on she spent several winters in Rome. She belonged to a very well-known family in Bucharest, and as a young girl had often been to Sinai when Queen Carmen Sylva was in residence. She once showed me an old *Book of Confessions* that had been given to her as a child, and which she had always kept because the Queen had written her "confession" in it. When asked to name her favourite composer, and a favourite composition she had written, "Bach, *und das Bächlein*" (referring to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony).

I had always longed to go to Roumania, and in my youth had composed the greater part of an opera to a libretto founded on some of the stirring Roumanian ballads collected by Mademoiselle Hélène Vacaresco under the title of "Bard of the Dimbovitza." The libretto—a really fine one—had been written for me by Alma Stretell, who translated these ballads into very beautiful English. But my knowledge of orchestration was not sufficient to enable me to write an opera, and much to my regret I had to abandon the idea. Mademoiselle Arion always spent her summers in Roumania, and I had half arranged to visit her there, when she died quite suddenly in Rome. She was so like a cultured, well-bred Frenchwoman that at first I should never have guessed her nationality; on closer acquaintance she revealed herself as far more cosmopolitan than most Frenchwomen. She spoke several languages and had travelled all over the world, including the Far East. A rather

alarming memento of her travels in Japan stood in one of the ante-rooms of her flat in Rome: a life-size tiger cast in metal. I stayed with her once at this apartment on the ground floor of the Palazzo Taverna; the courtyard of the palace which is situated in an old quarter of the city, not far from the Tiber, is one of the most beautiful and interesting in Rome. In the spring the walls are hung from top to bottom with roses.

After those four weeks in Como I joined my sister in Rome. I was not at all prepared for the beauty of the apartment she had taken in the Palazzo Canonici Mattei, Piazza Paganica, and fell in love with it at first sight. The Palazzo Canonici Mattei is one of the four historical houses that are all in one block in an old quarter of Rome near the lovely Tartaruga fountain. It was next door to the Palazzo Antici Mattei, and on one side was joined to the old palace that had been the home of the celebrated Vittoria Colonna, beloved of Michelangelo. Though it was only within a few minutes' walk of the gay and animated Corso, and quite close to the Campidoglio with the wide, imposing steps, at the top of which Michelangelo's splendid equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius looks over Rome, one was hardly aware of their proximity. With the exception of the Piazza Paganica itself, we were surrounded by narrow, medieval streets, where shrines were still fixed to the walls of many dark, mysterious-looking houses, and where one sometimes caught a glimpse of a garden high up on some old roof.

The ceilings of some of the rooms in my sister's apartment were quite beautiful and dated from the seventeenth century. On one of them was painted in glowing colours the history of David, on another the history of Joshua. They added immensely to the beauty of the rooms. The arms of the Orsini family were painted above the door of the great library, which I believe had at one time been a chapel. I have heard

people wonder how anyone can live in old Rome; but to my mind the wonder is how anyone can choose to live in modern Rome. I remember the charming American wife of the Councillor of the British Embassy coming to call on us for the first time one winter afternoon. As she stood in the doorway of the library (the actual door, by the way, which belonged to my sister, had been picked up in the shop of an antiquary and was a golden one which once adorned a Venetian palace) she stood quite still, looking down the long room where a log-fire was burning in the picturesque old fireplace at the far end, and then said enthusiastically: "*This* is what I call living in Rome."

And that is just what it was.

I was so in love with that golden door with its beautifully painted medallions that I often said to friends who came to see us: "Do let me show you the door."

One day my sister said laughingly to me: "It is to be hoped they won't take your words literally, for it doesn't sound very hospitable to be offering to show people the door when they've only been five minutes in the room."

We lived in Rome nearly six years, and then *force majeure* obliged us to leave, and the apartment I loved so much was turned into an office.

I revelled in every moment I spent in Rome. We made friends with several interesting Russians, and I took lessons in Russian with a friend of Scriabine's—a clever Jewess. She told me some extraordinary things about him, among others that he was persuaded he would never die. His mind must have become unhinged after the tragic and sudden death of his little boy: the poor little fellow was walking in the country with his governess and was running on in front of her, when suddenly, to the girl's horror, she saw him disappear in a swamp only a few yards away. It was impossible to rescue him;

she would only have lost her own life in the attempt to do so. But can a more terrible situation be imagined?

Russian refugees abounded in Rome in 1919. The coachman of the late Tsar, an Italian who had migrated to Russia as a young man, now found himself destitute in Rome with his wife and their only child. They were in real distress. No one would take on three people for whom no use could be found. Someone asked my sister if she could do anything for them, and she interviewed the man, telling him that although she didn't require a coachman, she *did* require a manservant—a butler. He accepted the situation and then she—characteristically—took on his wife and child. The first time she showed poor old Noto how to lay a dinner-table he was visibly perplexed, and the next day, after laying it by himself, he asked her to come and see if everything was all right. A few alterations having been found necessary, he said tragically: “Signora, I would far rather drive a four-in-hand round this table than lay it for dinner.”

He finally resigned himself to being a butler, and I remember how amused we were when he said one day: “Now that I'm in the mud (*nel fango*) I mustn't complain about anything.”

He couldn't bring himself to believe in the death of the Imperial family, and showed us dozens of photographs of himself driving the Tsar and Tsarina, riding with the young Grand Duchesses, etc. Poor old fellow!

In Rome I first met Katia Wolkoff—née Princess Galitzine. She was extremely talented, and had a remarkable gift for composition. She had been one of the Tsarina's maids of honour, but she studied hard in Petersburg like any other student. While she was still very young she married Nicholas Wolkoff, who was a few days younger than herself, and a son of

General Wolkoff who, I believe, administered the Tsar's properties in Siberia. After their marriage the young couple went to Leipsic to continue their studies. Had it not been for the outbreak of war, and had she been able to devote herself seriously for three or four years to the study of composition and orchestration, I am certain she would have taken a very honourable place among the younger Russian composers of the day. Both her instrumental and vocal music was original and powerful. A piece called *Désespoir*, written during the terrible days of the revolution, had, in my opinion, an unmistakable touch of genius; its sincerity was tremendous. Most of her compositions had that quality, but they sometimes lacked continuity and form, and one felt very strongly—at least I did—that some of these really remarkable compositions did not quite “come off” because her technical knowledge was not on a par with her great natural gifts. I showed several of her compositions to Herr Joseph Hoffman, who admired them very much. But the cruel struggle for life prevented the growth of the artist. There was an only child to educate, a brilliantly clever boy; neither time nor money could be spared for music or for the cultivation of her beautiful talent. As far as I know, she has given up all thoughts of a musical career, and the world of music is all the poorer, for she had the precious gift of originality.

An aunt of theirs, Mademoiselle Olga Kozlovsky, a daughter of a former Governor of the Caucasus, who lived with them in Rome, was one of the most gallant old women I have ever met. She was nearly seventy, and had lived all her life in luxury, but when I knew her she was sharing a tiny flat with the young Wolkoffs, where she cooked for them while they were at work, scrubbed the floors quite cheerfully and quite efficiently, went to market, and did all the house-keeping. She used to laugh at our Russian house-maid, a good-looking, ambitious woman, who was

determined to "make a lady" of her equally good-looking daughter.

"I've an idea," she used to say, with a twinkle in her eye, "that we'll make better cooks and housemaids than they will make ladies and princesses!"

We were all fond of her, and after her day's work she would often come and have tea with us at Piazza Paganica and stay on to dinner. She also gave me Russian lessons, and one summer when I remained in Rome, I saw a great deal of her. It was from her that I learned so much of Russian country life, and the fact that I had been in the Caucasus where she had lived during most of her life somehow drew us together. She was only six years old at the time of the Emancipation of the Serfs, but she remembered summers spent on the enormous country estates belonging to her relatives, and the life she described sounded more Oriental than European.

Vera Wolkoff, Katia's mother-in-law, made a very real impression on me. Lady Georgina Buchanan knew her very well in the old days when Sir George Buchanan was British Ambassador to Russia, and she told me that in her opinion she was one of the finest women she had ever known. She was not exactly beautiful, but I can't imagine any woman with her appearance ever wishing to look different. She was very distinguished-looking, simple, natural, cultured and artistic, and very lovable. And she had great strength of character, for when ruin stared them in the face in the little town where she and her husband lived for some years in Jugo Slavia, and where he worked in a timber business, she started a workshop, where, under her guidance, other Russian refugees did the most delicate and beautiful embroideries from designs supplied by her. They sold so well in Paris that she was able to provide scores of women and girls with work and money. Some of her own painted work on *mousseline de soie* was exquisite. We often sold things for her while we were in Rome, and I

took some of these embroideries to England, where they sold extremely well.

I have not seen anything of them for a long time, for General Wolkoff and his wife went to live on the Riviera, Katia and her husband went to Germany, while we remained in Italy, but not, alas, in Rome. The Wolkoffs and Mademoiselle Kozlovsky were by far the most interesting Russians I met during that period.

One of the last songs I ever wrote was written in Rome and is called "Leave-taking." The words are by William Watson and were sent to me by Robert Hichens. It was beautifully sung three or four years ago, at a concert I gave at the American Women's Club in Grosvenor Street, by Mr. Mark Raphael, a young singer of real distinction. My sister once lent him her beautiful room in Rome, where he gave a concert assisted by Roger Quilter and myself. He won golden opinions from everyone; he sang several old Italian songs, and his pronunciation was so good that Italians present found it difficult to believe that he was not Italian. Mark Raphael was at one time a pupil of Raymond von Zurmühlen, and his singing of Schubert and Schumann has often reminded me of that great artist.¹

Of late years I have not composed much. When one has nothing further to say, silence is best. But I did plenty of other work; among other things I translated the biography of Ingres, for the *édition de luxe* published by Messrs. Heinemann a little while ago. I also translated the *Memoirs* of Princess Pauline Metternich. I had met her when I was a young girl, in the shop of a Viennese antiquary to which I had been taken by a Russian friend of the Ferstels. There was only one person in the tiny shop when we entered, and my friend whispered to me:

¹ Since writing the above I have heard to my sincere regret of the death of my dear old friend.

"Die Pauline." After a moment she turned round and looked fixedly at me for a few seconds. Hers was an arresting personality. She was ugly, really ugly, but it didn't seem to matter in the least. She was interesting; you felt that instantly. When I came to translate her book, I was constantly reminded of the strong impression she had made on me in those few seconds. Many years later—after the war—she made great friends with my dear old friend, Erwin Ferstel. He was very ill at the time, and hardly—if at all—conscious of the interest he had aroused in her. They happened to be staying at the same hotel at Gastein (I think). After a day or two she went up to the table where he was sitting.

"Can't you *see* I want to know you?" she said.

His brother Wolfgang told me that that was the beginning of one of the most beautiful friendships between an elderly man and woman he had ever known. Erwin was in the Diplomatic Service, and had just been appointed Secretary to the Austrian Embassy in Paris, when war broke out. He was attractive and lovable, like all the Ferstels, and had a delightful mind. I saw him just before he died at his home in the Tyrol. We had been friends for fifty years.

I also translated a book called *Uncle Anghel* by Panait Istrati, a Roumanian author greatly befriended by Romain Rolland. This was published by Messrs. Knopf.

And lastly I translated a beautiful little play written in Tyrolese dialect, by a Viennese author, Herr Max Mell. It was called *The Apostle Play*, and was recently produced by Madame Olga Moussine-Pouchkine in New York. It was also given two or three times at St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden. It is a lovely, delicate piece of work in the original, and I thoroughly enjoyed translating it. The play has had an immense success all over Austria, South Germany and German

Switzerland, and I only hope that some day it may be better known in England.

I often went to Taormina for a few weeks in the spring while we were living in Rome, and was once there at the same time as Prince Felix Youssouppoff and his wife. I had known the Prince slightly in London. My sister and I had had an opportunity (through my dear friend, Valérie Balfour) of being of some use to a cousin of his, and he came to thank us. Afterwards, in Taormina, I saw a good deal of him. I had no piano at my cottage that year (or I should say at Giovannino's cottage, where I always put up) and now and again I used to go and play at the Hôtel Timeo when everyone was out. Prince Felix was very fond of music; he would slip quietly into the room and sit there till I had finished, when we would have a little talk. He had a really charming tenor voice, and would sometimes spend the evening at the cottage teaching me gipsy songs, which he sang to the accompaniment of his guitar. Only once did he touch on the appalling tragedy of their lives before they managed to escape to Constantinople. They had put out to sea in dark and threatening weather, but towards morning, as they approached Constantinople, the sun pierced through the clouds and bathed the world in light. "It seemed like a good omen for the future," he said, very simply.

One afternoon he and his wife came to tea with me. When Giovannino heard who she was he couldn't get over the fact that a niece of the late Tsar had actually had tea in his cottage, and this led to a very funny incident. A friend of my cousin Dora Grayson, a Mr. Wilson, called upon me shortly afterwards. I happened to be out, but on my return Giovannino brought me his card, and said in an awe-struck voice: "Is he the President of the United States?"

The war certainly brought a great many people

together who would never have known each other in ordinary circumstances, but I can't help laughing at the idea of my hobnobbing with President Wilson in Giovannino's cottage, an event to which I am sure he was secretly looking forward with immense gusto!

During the last five years I have lived in Florence where my sister, up to the present, has shared a villa with Miss Nora Forman, whose kind hospitality I have so often enjoyed during my visits to London. They have been uneventful years, except for 1930, when I once again went to Egypt with my sister and my friend, Dolores Holland, and her daughter. My sister and I stayed with our old friend, Harry Humphreys, at his charming country house at Boulaq Dacoor, near Cairo. And this time, though I was physically so much less able to enjoy things, I think—in fact I *know*—that I enjoyed everything a great deal more than I did on my first visit. Everything meant much more to me; the Spirit of Youth had forsaken my body, but it had gallantly refused to forsake *me*! We went as far as Assouan, where one of the first people to greet me warmly and affectionately was Nellie Melba, whom I hadn't seen for years. I little thought we were to lose her so soon.

Often I live again through that visit to Egypt as I sit in my study, and visions of all I saw rise before my mind and carry me away far, far from Florence—the Pyramids, the Sphinx, upon which I looked with very different eyes from last time, the wonderful old mosques of Cairo, the beautiful old Arab house, still inhabited and one of the last existent, buried away in a maze of dark and narrow streets, the imposing outlook over the city from the heights of the Citadel, the Museum with all the wonderful treasures from Tutankhamen's tomb, the lovely view from the garden of the Residency, where one afternoon we met Lord Allenby, the palm-fringed Nile, the magical dawn among the palm-groves as the train rushed past Karnack on its way to Luxor, the great temples, the

Ramasseum, the savage beauty of the Valley of the Kings, the tomb of Tutankhamen into which I little thought I would ever descend, when I first read of its discovery, the strange negro village at Assouan, just behind the luxurious hotel crowded with visitors from every quarter of the globe, the broad stretches of the Nile before you reach the First Cataract, and loveliest and most unforgettable of all, a sunset I saw at Luxor from the terrace of the Winter Palace that looks across the river to the tawny Libyan Hills. It was divine, and so was the afterglow that followed it. I watched them from first to last with the dear and faithful friend to whom this book is dedicated, and as we silently looked upon the glorious procession of colours—rose, sapphire, amber, green, melting into each other, as we looked upon them through the leaves of the splendid palm trees waving in the evening breeze, palm trees that stand like sentinels to guard the eternal mystery, the eternal romance of the Nile, it seemed to me that all the splendour that was illuminating the firmament, that all the beauty that was streaming across the sky, that all the world, was ringing with that inspired cry: "The Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork."

INDEX

ALEXANDER, QUEEN, 193
 Allenby, Lord, 276
 Alvarez, Madame, 262
 Anderson, Mary. *See* Navarro,
 Mary de
 Aosta, Duchess of, 200
 Arion, Madame Zoe, 267
 Arnold, Edward, 240
 Asquith, Mr. and Mrs., 160, 249

BAGOT, MR. RICHARD, 261
 Balfour, Mr., 210 ff.
 —, Monty and Valérie, 210 ff.,
 263 f.

Barrington, Sir Eric and Lady,
 75

Bechstein Hall, 93, 119
 Belgiojoso, Princess, 111
 Bell, Gertrude, 193 f.
 Benson, Monsignor Hugh, 46
 Binyon, Bertram, 259

Bizet, 102

Blake, Sir and Lady Harry,
 121 f.

Blunt, Lady Anne, 144
 —, Wilfred Scawen, 144

Bordonaro, Donna Diano, 263

Borodine, 237

Bourbon, Queen of the Sicilies,
 83

Bridport, Viscount, 3, 13 f.

Brown, Horatio, 39

Bruce, Harry, 256

Buchanan, Lady Georgina, 264,
 272

Burnham, Lord, 157, 166, 179,
 201

Byard, Theodore, 34

CACCIOLA, DR. SALVATORE, 181
 Caffin, Miss Maud, 259

Campbell, Mrs. Patrick, 26
 Carmelites, the, 111
 Carmen Sylva, Queen, 267
 Cazalet, Mrs., 259
 Cecchoni, Signor, 27, 240
 Chaplin, Florence, 37 f.
 Cohen, Hermann, 110 ff.
 Compton, Annie, 162 f., 193
 Conti, Emilia, 260
 Craig, Miss, 260
 Crawford, Marion, 73
 Cromer, Lady, 135
 —, Lord, 134, 145
 Crowe, Sir Eyre, 251 f.
 Cust, Harry, 249

DAWKINS, CLINTON, 161
 —, Lady, 161, 179, 253 f.
 Drummond-Hay, Amy, 254
 Drury, Juanita, 1

EDWARD VII, KING, 193
 Elwes, Gervase, 206
 Erskine, David, 14

FARIA, ALFREDO G., 98
 Fazzari, Signor, 164 f.
 Ferstel, Erwin, 215, 274
 —, Wolfgang, 274
 Fitzgerald, Lord, 121 f., 132
 —, Mr. and Mrs., 102
 Florence, 276
 Folk-songs, 21
 Forman, Nora, 276
 Fuller-Maitland, 93

GALLI-MARITÉ, MADAME, 101
 Genée, Adeline, 255
 Goetz, Alice, 179

Grayson, Lady, 251, 256 ff., 275
 Greek Theatre, 6 f.

INDEX

Greene, Harry Plunkett, 52, 193.
206

Grey, Lord, 250

HAMILTON, LADY, 83 f.

Harrington, Daniel, 83

Henry, Sir Edward, 251

Hermann, Father, 111 ff.

Hichens, Canon, 76

—, Robert, 1, 3, 5, 23 ff.,
93, 105, 116, 181 ff., 200 ff.

Hoffman, Herr Joseph, 271

Holland, Mrs. George, 158, 276

Hood, Sir Alexander, 3, 13, 18
f., 59 f., 80 ff., 128, 154, 173 f.,
202, 256

Hügel, Baron von, 44 f.

—, Baroness Hildegard, 143 f.

—, Lady Mary von, 44 f., 120 f.

Hulse, Lady George, 166

Humphreys, Harry, 85 f., 122 ff.,
133 ff., 276

INNES, MITCHELL, 146 f.

Irving, Washington, 100

JOHNSTONE, KATI, 161, 195 f.

—, Mrs., 196 f.

—, Poppy, 161

KARSAVINA, MADAME, 255

Kitchener, Lord, 249, 256

Koch, William, 179

Kozlovsky, Mademoiselle Olga,
271 f.

LAMPERTI, 90

Lehmann, Liza, 198

Liszt, 110 f.

Londesborough, Lady, 193

London, 115

Lopokova, Madame, 240

Lunn, Kirkby, 20

Lyttleton, Arthur, 62 f.

—, Mrs. Alfred, 211, 249

MACHELL, LADY VALDA, 134 ff.

Madrid, 97

Manchester, Duchess of, 179

Margherita, Queen, 261

Marlborough, Duchess of, 209

Martindale, Bertha, 193, 257,
262 ff.

Maspero, Monsieur, 136 f., 146

Maturin, Father, 45

McKenna, Mr., 166

McLeod, Fiona. See Sharp,
William

Melba, Nellie, 276

Mellien, Marie, 164

Messina earthquake, 128, 169 ff.

Metternich, Count, 166 f., 200 f.

—, Princess Pauline, 273 f.

Millet, Frank, 210

Milner, Lord, 161

—, Sir Frederick, 247 f.

Montefiore, Claude, 44

Moussine-Pouchkine, Madame,
137, 274

Murray, John, 252

Mussolini, Signor, 120

NAVARRO, MARY DE, 49 ff., 95.

116, 131 f., 204 f.

—, Tony de, 131 f.

Nelson, Lord, 13, 16, 20 f., 83

Nordau, Max, 202

Northampton, Lord, 203

O'CONNOR, T. P., 166

Oldenburg, Duke of, 227

Oxford, Lady. See Mrs. Asquith

PARRY, SIR HUBERT, 12

Pavlova, Anna, 193, 237, 262

Pembroke, Lord, 39

Pickthall, Marmaduke, 146

Pius X, Pope, 94, 165

Poisson, Monsieur Armand,
159 f.

Poynter, Sir Edward and Lady,
76

QUILTER, ROGER, 273

RADNOR, LADY, 37 ff.

Raphael, Mark, 273

Rathbone, Mrs. William, 206

Rehan, Ada, 75 f.

Reszke, Jean de, 34

Ricordi, Signor Tito, 92 f.

Ristori, Madame, 74

Roberts, Lord, 250

Rodd, Evelyn, 27

—, Lady, 239 ff., 245 f.,
263 ff.

INDEX

- Rodd, Sir Rennell, 27, 245
 Rome, 109, 129 f., 193, 268
 Rothschild, Baroness, 108
 —, Mrs. Leopold, 203
 Rumford, Bertie, 52
 Russia, 213 ff.
- SAINT-SAËNS, 146
 Sassoon, Mrs., 203
 Schuster, Frank, 40, 80
 Sharp, Mr. and Mrs. William,
 18 ff., 57 ff.
 Sherrard, O. A., 84
 Smith, Sir Horace Dorrien, 260
 Smyth, Ethel, 12
 Spain, Queen of, 198
 Spencer, Lord, 48
 Speyer, Sir Edgar, 179
 Stanley, Sir Arthur, 254
 Strickland, Lady Mary, 259
 Suggia, Madame, 259
 Sullivan, Josephine, 239
 Sutherland, Duchess of, 37 f.,
 67
 —, Duke of, 37
 Swinton, Mrs. George, 92 f., 119
- TAORMINA, 9 ff., 23, 52, 62, 80,
 107, 126, 130 f.
 Tartaglia, Professor, 240
 Terry, Ellen and Marion, 253,
 260 ff.
 Thierry, Monsieur, 253 f.
 Tosti, Signor, 162 f.
 Trevor, Claude, 91
 Tyrrel, Father, 45 f.
- VERNE, ADELA, 262
 Vernet, Horace, 111
 Vickers, Mrs. Albert, 179
 Vienna, 215
- WAKEFIELD, MARY, 66
 —, William, 66
 Wallace, Mary, 156
 Waller, Lewis, 206
 Whitaker, Mr. and Mrs., 120
 White, Emmie, 23, 85 ff., 193,
 210 f., 268 ff.
 —, Col. Fred, 253
 —, Mr. and Mrs. Harry, 192
- White, Maude Valérie, 103, 134,
 189, 193, 207, 259
 "Absent yet Present," 34
 Arab tunes, 32 f.
 "A Song of the Sahara," 92
 Biography of Ingres (trans-
 lation), 273
Buon Riposo, 20
 "Fahrwohl du goldne
 Sonne," 134
Friends and Memories
 (book), 240
 "From the Ionian Sea,"
 135 f.
 "Isaotta Blanzesmano," 92,
 119
 "King Charles," 206
 "Leave-taking," 273
Memoirs of Princess Pauline
Metternich (translation),
 273
 "Oriental" poem, 101
Pastorale, 135
 "So we'll go no more a-
 roving," 206
Tarantella di Taormina,
 135, 260
The Apostle Play (transla-
 tion), 274
The Law of the Sands
 (musical setting), 26
The Enchanted Heart
 (ballet), 238 ff., 255, 262
 Tourgueneff prose poem
 (translation), 225
Uncle Anghel (translation),
 274
- Wilde, Mrs. Carrington, 261
 Wolkoff, General, 273
 —, Katia, 270, 273
 —, Monsieur, 40
 —, Nicholas, 270
 —, Vera, 272
 Wood, Sir Henry, 253, 261
- YOUSSEUPOFF, PRINCE FELIX,
 275
- ZORILLA, 101
 Zurmühlen, Raymond von, 101,
 108 f., 273

